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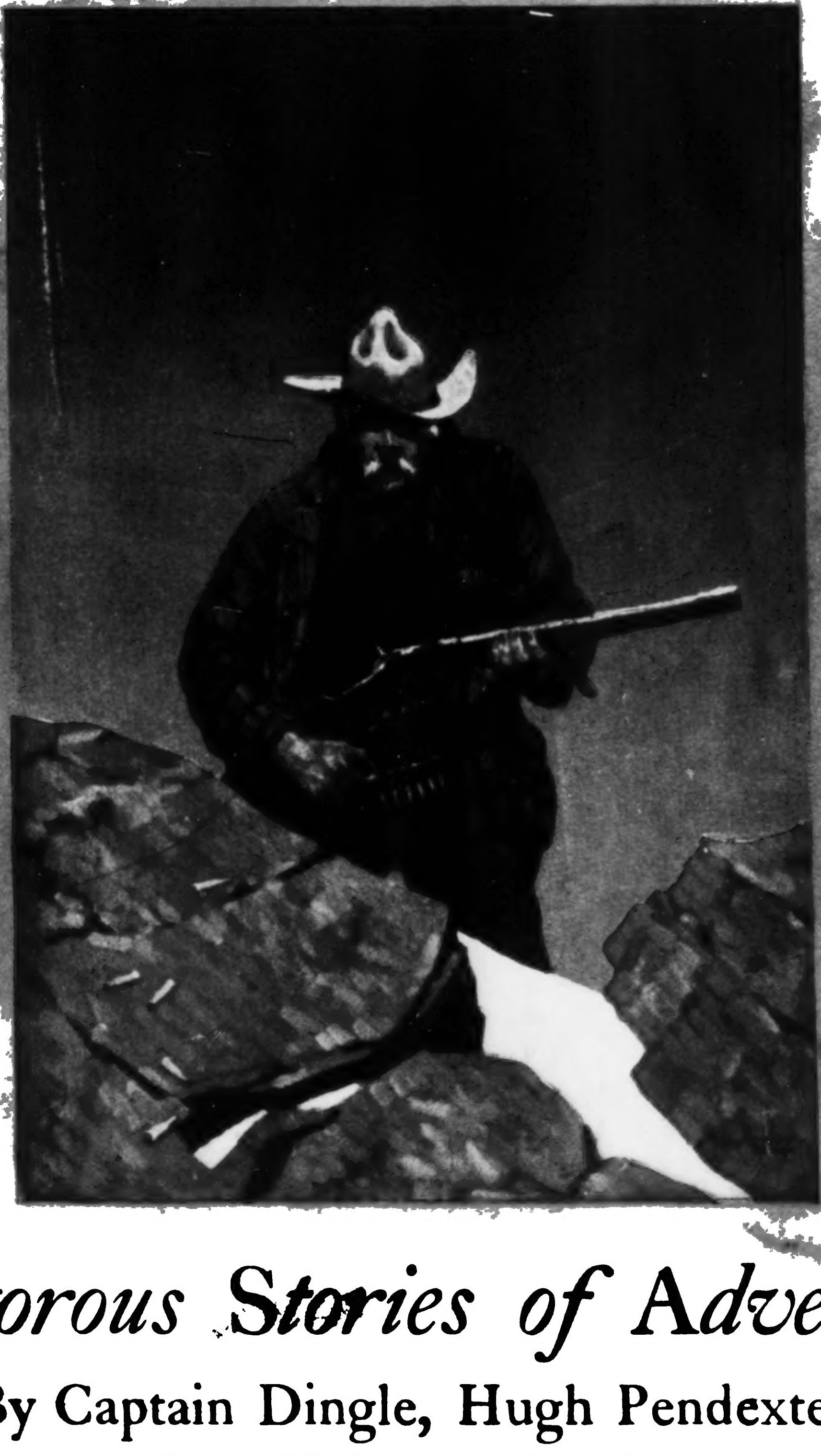

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Ared White *and Others*

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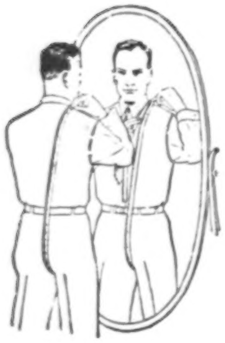

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July, 1927
Vol. LVII No. 1

Everybody's

OSCAR GRAEVE
Editor

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Cover Painting by A. L. Ripley
Headings by V. E. Pyles

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE RIDGWAY COMPANY
JOSEPH A. MOORE, President LEVIN RANK, Secy. & Treas.
SPRING AND MACDOUGAL STREETS, NEW YORK, N. Y.

Entered as Second-Class Matter, August 16, 1899, at the Post-Office, New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Brooklyn, New York. Yearly subscription, $2.50, in advance. Single copy, twenty-five cents. Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. No extra postage for Canada.

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All the Romance of the Old West is in

The Way *of* Billy *Mc*Queen

By HUGH PENDEXTER

HERE are the facts about the Crazy Kid and Billy McQueen. As I lived the story it started with the Kid, shifted to McQueen, and in the wind-up was concerned with the two of them. Enough years have crowded between me and that wild summer to allow a straight talk. Any old-timers who remember the Kid must agree I haven't overdrawn his crazy lawlessness for the sake of making a yarn. It's quite the other way around: I've omitted much. Likewise: any who remember McQueen will testify I haven't exaggerated his likeableness.

The Kid's actions were streaked by such audacity as to set him apart from the average lawbreaker. We who believed the hanging of Plummer and his gang had discouraged hold-ups were sadly jolted once the Kid commenced working around Butte in the summer of '67. At the outset his boldness amazed us. Soon folks were calling him "crazy"; but I found him sane enough to dodge me and my posse each time I hit his trail. The nearest I could get to him was to sight his long yellow hair, flopping over his shoulders, as he scooted out of gunshot. Those who suffered none from his levies had a sneaking regard for his daring, and rather favored his escapes. As no bloodshed spotted his deviltry the citizens were satisfied to leave the game between him and me. I hungered for the time when I could run him down and stop the joking at my expense.

My experiences with the slippery fellow

Copyright, 1927, by Hugh Pendexter.

were threatening to sour my disposition for all time when Billy McQueen drifted into my life. He came from Rocker, five miles away. He gave as his reason, "Butte has better gambling facilities." Billy was given to talking like a scholar. He was cleaned out shortly after arriving in town. His pockets were empty when I first met him on the street. His mild blue eyes invited talk. After I had accosted him and had learned his name and plight I urged him to get honest work and stick to it. There was no excuse for idleness in Butte that summer.

The wages were excellent and he worked hard; but only long enough to save a stake. Then he was back at the tables again. This time his luck held for a goodish stretch, and I got in the habit of stopping and talking with him. At last I invited him to put up with me. He moved to my cabin and in a short time was calling me "Pop". Being a law-officer I wasn't over flush until a certain claim should pan out rich. Billy must have guessed as much as he insisted on paying our grub-bill. I compromised by letting him pay his half, although he ate but few meals in the cabin. As a fact, except when broke, he paid the whole shot despite all my objections.

Aside from his mania for gambling he seemed to have no bad habits. I never knew him to take a drink, or to enter a dance-hall. Nor was he quarrelsome: a trifle too good-natured if anything. From all I heard I decided he had no tricks of the professional gambler, but simply backed his luck.

I liked the boy. Liked him immensely. When I scolded, which was often, he listened as respectfully as if I had been his father, and would readily admit I was right. But he kept on in his wasteful way. He slept during the day and was gone much of the night. When broke he would work a few days at seven dollars per, for the placers were paying a thousand a day when the owner could hire men. Billy could always get a job once he had shown he was no shirker. But he was frank to say he hated it. When we discovered the rich placers were very shallow and would soon peter out, Billy was one who had no regrets. He never ceased being a greenhorn. That is, he was neat and fussy about his clothes and must go to the barber just so often, whether in luck or out.

ONE day, after he had been with
for a month, he was reduced
some bob-tail dust, as we called
amalgam. He had won it at old sledge f
a Colorado man. It was a trifling stake,
he started with it for a gambling hall.
the way he spied two books in a store
dow, and he remembered my love for re
ing. He spent half his dust for "Poems
Robert Burns," and "Parson on Contract
He was scarcely out of the store when
stage-driver held him for three dollars
three letters. We always reckoned it wo
a dollar to get a letter. But after Billy
forked over and had opened his letters
returned to the shack. I could hear
laughing before he opened the door.
smiled in sympathy. But the minute
came in I read misery in his blue eyes.

"What is it, Billy?" I anxiously asked

"Oh, nothing. Everything is all rig
Then he commenced laughing again.

I was suspicious, believing he was mak
fun of himself. "Bad news, son?"

He tossed the letters into my lap and sa
"Read them, Pop. All from the same p
son. Exactly the same thing in each o
She was afraid I wouldn't hear about i

"A woman." And I did not offer to re
the letters.

"Young lady back home. She's throu
with me."

I felt mighty sorry for him. I advis
"You cut out gambling and return and
her back."

"She doesn't know I gamble. As to g
ting her back she's already married t'oth
fellow. I knew I was a loser before comi
west. It was my knowing that that sent
here." Then he laughed some more and
plained how he had nearly gone broke pa
ing for the letters. Sobering down he
plained, "I was fool enough to reckon
was calling me home. Seeing the three
them."

For the first and only time I offered
stake him. I pitied him that much.
shook his head and shifted over to his wo
ing clothes and thick boots. For a week
worked for the man who bought Bob M
Minn's claim for two hundred dollars
was far on the way to cleaning up a quar
of a million. Those seven evenings
home were happy times for me. "Pars
on Contracts" went rather hard, althou
Billy's smooth voice would make alm
anything sound interesting. But Bu

was good. One line drove center; how it would help a fellow most amazing if he could stand off one side and see himself as other folks size him up. I hoped the youngster would profit by it. With fifty dollars in his pocket he returned to the tables and prospered mightily for another week. Then he decided he would crowd his luck by going to Rocker and cleaning out the fellows who had sent him to Butte, busted.

I WOULD have missed him keenly if not for the call to action. The Crazy Kid robbed the south-bound stage and got away with twenty thousand in currency and dust. I chased that brat to hell-and-gone, and the best I could do was to glimpse his streaming hair as he topped a ridge. I emptied my rifle. For ten days I trailed him without sighting him again, and was convinced he had taken to the Big Hole mountains south of Deer Lodge prairie. I was plumb disgusted and ugly clear through when I got back to Butte and was met with grins.

McQueen was working for day wages again; and for once I didn't feel much sympathy for him. The Rocker outfit had taken his hide. In self-defense he insisted, "My luck was all right, but they cold-decked me."

"Cold-decked you? How do you know that?"

"It was so clumsy a blind man could see it."

"Trimmed you standing and you knuckled under!"

"I never tote guns and haven't any fighting notions. They banked on that," he explained.

"And you didn't kick?"

"Just how much is a man's life worth? I mean to him? I lost a thousand. Not one in that gang who doesn't think his life is worth all the money there is. If I'd had a gun and killed a man he'd always believe I cheated him. Ended a five or a fifty thousand-dollar life for a thousand in dust and greenbacks."

"You talk like an idiot, Billy. Not that I hone to see you shooting-up folks. But a dead man can't do any thinking. And not a scut down at Rocker, dead or alive, is worth a tinker's damn. When you saw their game why didn't you pull out, if you wouldn't stand up for your rights?"

He hung his head and confessed, "Pride. Maybe you'd call it shame. I'd rather they would think me a greeny than to think I wouldn't stand up for my rights. So I went through with it."

"Crazier'n a coot" I told him. It was disgusting. I went on, "I've staked you in on several likely claims. But I'm going to fix it, if we strike it rich, and I should happen to peg out, so you'll get grub and a bed, year in and year out, but nothing more."

"Why, Pop, that's mighty fine of you. Any man sure of bed and board ought to be fully satisfied. That's all we get out of life, anyway."

"That's foolishness, but if you believe it, why toss your money away at cards?"

"I want my bed and board without wading to my waist in cold water, without tugging and lifting rocks . . . Well, no use asking how you made it. I'd heard the news if you'd won out."

"Not a bit of use, Billy, unless you want to make me mad. Like chasing a shadow. Saw him once. Out of range. He hides up in the foothills of the Big Hole mountains. He has his failing and you have yours. The two of you get about the same thing out of life. Going out?"

"Just to try my luck."

"Written that gal yet?"

"Why should I? She's married."

"Just as good fish in the sea as ever was caught."

He grinned, but there was no fun-making in his eyes. "I thought a heap of her, Pop. But she liked t'other chap the best before I ever touched a card. When I let on I might go West I didn't really expect to do it. But she took it so mighty calm that I had to go through with it. In the back of my head, when I tried that, my first bluff, I had hopes. She called the hand. Shucks."

"If she'd loved you, you'd stayed in the East, and never gambled?" I asked.

"Of course I'd stayed East. Never dreamed of gambling till I got out here."

"Then you're well rid of her if she was that notional."

"Not by a long chalk, Pop. She's prim and precise, and I measured up according to her yardstick, but that wasn't enough. Funny thing about it is that the fellow she cottoned to likes cards and rum, lots of the last. But play this with a copper: there never was, or can be, anyone just like Annie . . . See here, Pop. Bet you fifty I break the faro-bank to-night."

"If you bust the bank you won't need my fifty. If you lose you'd have to work that extra to pay me."

"I was funning," he muttered. "I'd never take your money, not even for a grub stake."

Now I was ashamed at myself and sorrier than ever for him. I clapped my hand on his shoulder and told him, "Billy, busted or in bonanza, always come back. And we must find time to prospect that Burns man some more."

Poor lad. He would grin to hid the hurt in his heart, and he hid nothing. That night must have been a wild one for him. A monte-dealer told me about it next day, while Billy was sleeping in the cabin. He commenced by betting all he had on the single turn of a card in the monte game. He repeated, going the limit, until he broke the bank. Then he shifted to faro and for three hours carried everything before him. His winnings would have supplied street talk had he quit at the crest of his luck. But he never would stop, while winning. His motto was, "Crowd your luck". And he never believed in quitting while a loser so long as the money held out. The house began to get at him; yet he rallied and came back strong. The only way to come out a winner is to stop while you're ahead. Early morning, the most mournful part of the day for them who are spreeing, found him flat busted. I knew he was broke when he came in while I was making the coffee. Not that he lacked his smile and light way of talking, but by his going direct to the corner and getting out his old clothes and rough boots.

"Going to work?"

"They got to me," he sheepishly confessed. "Faro. There was the flutter of a card that shouldn't have fluttered."

"Dealer cheated."

"Well, I let it go down there, and I shouldn't have made any talk about it up here . . . Well, well, I'll clean them yet."

"Clean a crooked game?" I repeated in disgust. "See here, Billy: a man who'll stand for a trimming in a crooked game ought to be put in one of those houses back in the States, where they keep queer people. There isn't any such critter as square gambling. At least, not here in Butte. Can't you see everyone knows you're gun-shy, and that when they find you in a streak of luck they'll hog you out of it? They're laughing at you."

In his twisted way of looking at things he defended, "If I was a killer I'd get t cheating, knowing no one would dare kid But when I can't be a square gambler I quit."

"You're a young fool. Coffee's ready Now for a week's work. We can have rea ing at night."

"Sorry, Pop; but I'm going down t Rocker for a stake this time."

This was disappointing. I looked at th muddy boots, and wondered how man backaches he'd suffered in earning mone to hand over to the pasty-faced vermin If he could only get the same thrill in chas ing the Crazy Kid I could have used him a a deputy and kept him busy all summer. I he had a thousandth part of the sand as a deputy that he had as a plunger I could hav used him fine. I remarked as much.

He laughed at the notion and shame lessly confessed, "I'd be as much good a an armless man in a wrestling match. Gun play isn't my fodder. Never yet saw a po that was worth shooting for." He ate and turned in, and I went out and got the de tails from the monte-dealer, as I've already told.

BILLY was gone when I returned to the cabin. His trim store-clothes on the pegs were pathetic. I tried to get something out of "Parsons on Contracts," and was finding the roads blocked in spots, when a citizen came tearing up the slope, bawling my name most excidedly. I yelled back and drew on my boots and was fastening my belt when he came through the door.

"The Crazy Kid!" he panted.

"What's he done this time?" I snapped.

"Steger's gambling-hall. Came through the open window at the back end, gun in each fist. Stood off the crowd while he swept the money on the tables into a bag. Ended by cleaning Steger of the house-roll. Tossed the bag out the winder to his partner. Stood the crowd off till the man had got a good start, then went through the winder and galloped away. All done in no time. Not a shot fired. They're chasing him, but they won't run their hosses into sweat to catch him. They think he's making for Silver Bow creek."

It was sickening. One man holding up a whole room of men. For two months I'd been asking for just one thing; to get within short shooting range with the Kid. The boldness of the robbery was maddening.

It was the first time the Kid had worked in Butte. Close to it several times, but never in the town itself. I knew I must run down the Kid or quit playing at being sheriff.

Hunting for him in the dark was like a blind man playing checkers. When I was riding from town I met some of the citizens' posse returning. They hadn't chased the Kid far, if at all. I had to ride somewhere, however. The last time I had given chase the way led to the north side of the Big Hole mountains. The Kid was too smart not to have more than one hiding place, and I suspected the flight to the Big Holes was intended to make me believe it was the refuge of the two outlaws. Yet I would ride north and trust to luck. I droppped down to Rocker and had an early breakfast with Billy McQueen. He said he was returning to Butte by the end of the week, when he proposed to show our local sharks a brand of luck that could not be cold-decked.

I scouted around considerable and happened to fall in with a broken-down gambler from a camp on Silver Bow creek. He was garrulous for one of his calling and was keen to reach Rocker and try his luck. Luck had turned and he was convinced some big pots awaited him. His belief was based on an inexplicable happening on the creek. Penniless, and wondering if it would be a good idea to see how big a hole a derringer could make in his head, he reached in his pocket for the murderous little gun and brought forth ten or a dozen gold coins. He recalled a man brushing against him when he was leaving a saloon, empty of pocket and broken in courage. I could see the finding of the coins impressed him as resulting from a supernatural agency. It was a command for him to try again. Now there was nothing in this to make me belive the Crazy Kid was hiding anywhere along the Silver Bow creek, and yet I found a notion in my head to prospect that creek the next time the Kid called me to the saddle.

I got back to Butte shortly after Billy's arrival there, and I found him in the cabin, changing to his fine clothes. I was hungry for a long evening alone with him and our two books, but he was that crazy to get at a game I said nothing. He aroused me early in the morning by returning with a thousand in gold. He was highly elated and bragged as a youngster will. He could not see any irony in his way of living. The man who paid him day wages on the Rocker placer had picked up that very week a chunk of gold worth eighteen hundred dollars. I tried to make him believe that half the time he spent at the tables, if spent prospecting, would bring him a fortune.

He tossed his winnings into a corner, and replied, "You're forgetting, Pop, the hundreds of half starved men who've been chasing gold for years and are lucky to find enough to pay for the grub and whisky. Most of those fellows who find it are working for me. They fetch it to the tables and it crosses to my side."

"Not forgetting the weeks you've put in, wading in muck and water, with everything you found going to the owner's side of the table," I told him.

He made a face to show I had scored, but nothing could dampen his high spirits. I grew more severe and asked him, "What if that prim, precise young woman back east hears of your gambling ways?"

"She's already made her choice."

"But wouldn't you like to have her respect? You wouldn't want her to feel she was mighty wise to drop you into the discard."

His sudden change of expression made me sorry I had talked so plainly. With a harsh little laugh he said, "You're forgetting she married a man who gambles and punishes whisky. I've often thought I'd been more of a favorite if I'd been more of a devil." This made me wonder if he had not taken to gambling because of the notion he had lost his girl by being too proper. He had but little to say during breakfast. After we had eaten and I was leaving, and he was making ready for bed, I ventured to speak of the big nugget again. He nodded. He always seemed to be agreeing to everything I said. He told me, "You make a lot of that nugget and other lucky strikes. Now just to prove I'm in luck I'll get a nugget as big as that."

"Son, the biggest nugget you ever could find would be to wake up, quit your fool way of living, and buckle down to honest work."

He puckered his lips and stared at the low roof. I waited in the doorway, feeling he had something he wanted to say. Shifting his gaze to me he said, "All right, Pop. So long as you feel that way, and take it so much to heart. One more fling, and win or lose, I'll quit."

"Billy, if you'll only stick to that!" I cried. "Do that, and you'll travel far."

He smiled slightly and said, "Depends on what you call traveling far. But I'll go some distance."

That afternoon I found Billy up and dressed when I returned to the cabin. He was sober, almost melancholy. I feared he was regretting his promise. "Weakening, Billy?" I asked.

"No, Pop. One more fling, and, win or lose, you'll never say Billy McQueen didn't live up to his word. But I've been wondering if it won't separate us? A man can loaf and gamble almost anywhere. But when he works he has to go where work pays the biggest wage."

But I wouldn't agree to that! "Plenty of diggings in and around Butte. I'm foot free, son. This sheriff's job begins to gall, what with the Kid keeping me on the hotfoot to no purpose."

That was one evening I didn't mind staying alone. It was to be the last night of gambling for Billy McQueen if I was not entirely mistaken in my knowledge of human nature. I went to bed early and slept later than usual. I was surprised to see Billy's bunk empty. Yet a man making his last prance is apt to stick till the last gun is fired.

I finished my breakfast and was about to wash the few dishes when Jansen, one of my deputies, burst into the room and excidedly told me, "Hell's to pay, Boss. Big hold-up at Rocker. Crazy Kid cleaned up the gambling room there. His partner took advantage of the excitement to get away with nearly two hundred pounds of prime dust. Posse chased them to Silver Bow Creek."

My surmise was correct. I told the deputy, "They're making for the Hell Gate."

I believed the Kid and his partner were this time striking for Canada. It was time to forget pride and take along enough men to make it a real race. The horse-load of gold would hold them back. If they lacked fresh mounts much might happen to even up the chase, despite their long lead. By the time I had secured my horse Jansen had half a dozen swift-riding, sure-shooting men ready to follow me. We struck for the Silver Bow and when nearly on that creek we met some of the citizens' posse, with two men riding double. They were boiling with rage because two excellent horses had been shot by the two outlaws. They believed that one of the outlaws was wounded.

I FAIRLY yelled, so great was my excitement and joy, as I beheld a masked horseman with long yellow hair appear at the mouth of a gulch. On beholding us he reined in, as if hesitating. Jansen was the first to open fire, and the Crazy Kid wheeled about and raced up the gulch. We pounded after him and were in time to see the floating locks vanish around a shoulder of rock. I was in the lead when we rounded the rocks. The yellow hair was vanishing through the low doorway of a small cabin. The horse trotted a short distance up the gulch.

We had followed the trail for two days and were fifty miles north of Butte and within a few miles of Cadotte's Pass. Had not the citizens' posse insisted the two men were striking north we would have lost our great chance by wasting our time in combing the narrow ravines in the Big Hole Mountains far south of our present position. Doubtless the two rascals had various hiding places and had been careful not to frequent any one too often.

Dismounting I told my men, "Boys, we've got one of them, the Kid. Take cover and riddle that shack."

"T'other feller must 'a' been mortally hurt by the posse," cheerfully said Jansen as the men slipped behind rocks and commenced shooting.

An occasional shot answered our fire, but the lead went wild. Our horses moved up the gulch to where the outlaw's nag was listlessly standing. One of my boys started to head them off, but a bullet kicked up the dirt at his feet and sent him scurrying back. So few shots answered our straggling fire that Jansen insisted the man was almost at the end of his ammunition. But, whereas I had honed to shoot it out alone with the Kid, now I was extremely cautious. Too many times it had seemed he was cornered only to find he had outgamed us. Now we had him, and I kept pride behind me and insisted no man take a chance.

Our fire quickened, the lead searching out every crevice in the shack. It dropped only when a white cloth was waved at the open doorway. One of the boys yelled, "He quits! Can't stand the brad!"

I called for silence. Without showing

himself the Kid shouted, "I've finished my fight. Come, and find a dead man." Then came the report of a gun. For a count of five we gaped at the cabin, the same thought in each mind. Jansen spoke first, complaining, "He's killed himself!"

Whether he had, or hadn't, I could hold back no longer. Jumping to my feet and with both guns ready I raced for the cabin, and my men pounded after me. I kept the door and window covered but no life showed. I halted abruptly on the threshold and lowered my hands, and over my shoulder announced, "He meant it, boys. Trail's ended."

The men crowded close and looked by me, and looked through the small hole of a window. In one corner, head pillowed on one arm and the right hand grasping a revolver, was the outlaw. The long yellowish hair fell over the shoulders, unstirred by the wind now. All I could think off was the mane of a dead horse.

"No. He wasn't bluffing, boys," I said as we filed into the low room.

"And I'd reckoned he was a younger man," mused Jansen; and I knew he had noticed the coarse stubble of beard on the dead man's face.

One of the boys turned the body over and jerked back in surprise. The yellow mass of hair had fallen loose and left exposed a long thatch of black hair. Jansen dropped beside the silent figure and exclaimed, "The man of all work at Steger's place!"

"To think that feller was cute enough to fool us!" softly exclaimed another. "Always took him to be a lunkhead."

"See here! This man's been shot twice! Both times by a heavy rifle ball! Where's the rifle?" shrilly cried Jansen.

There was no rifle. What was more, *rigor mortis* had set in. The man had been dead for some time.

"Tricked!" I cried.

The very simplicity of it had completely fooled us. The Kid had packed his dead, or dying partner to the shack, had ridden back to the mouth of the gulch to see if the chase was close, and found we were at his heels. He had raced to cover and waited until we had dismounted and our horses had started to wander. Then he had placed his wig on the head of the dead man, made his dramatic announcement and fired a gun into the dirt floor, and had slipped out the back window when he saw us approaching in a body.

I jumped for the door and was outside in time to see a horseman disappearing up the gulch. My horse was trained to come when I whistled and I was mounted and giving chase before any of the boys had climbed a saddle. The gulch twisted and turned and the Kid was often out of sight. He might have laid for me without much risk, for none of my men were in sight when he took to a side gulch. I went after him, hoping he would be brought up by a blind wall, but feared the contrary, as the Kid was too smart not to know the country surrounding any of his hiding-places. There would be back doors wherever he pitched his camp. For an hour I chased through the winding ravine, never more than glimpsing his bowed back. I kept shifting my gaze from wall to wall, expecting him to try scaling one of the rough sides. As he made no such an attempt, and as the gulch began to contract, I knew there must be a way out at the upper end.

THEN came a narrow, rugged incline, and I was emerging on a half a mile of broken ground. The fugitive was a quarter of a mile ahead and aiming for rolling grass lands. I held my own, gained a trifle if anything, but once he reached the grass he rapidly pulled away from me. Then did defeat taste bitter between my teeth. After he crossed the first grassy ridge he would shake me off in some maze of gulches, or timber. I bitterly vowed I never again would start out on a man-chase without a rifle.

When I entered the grass he was more than half way up the ridge, and his horse was far superior to mine. When I had covered half of the level he was finishing the slope and with a flourish of the hand was disappearing. I believed I had lost out once more and must step aside for a better man to fill my official shoes. I kept on, however, hoping to sight him once I was over the rise: I heard the bark of a gun and wondered what he was shooting at. Came the wild thought that his horse had given out, or stepped in a hole, and he was killing the poor animal. My own mount was laboring heavily, but I held him to the cruel work. Then to my amazement a horsemen appeared against the skyline. It was the Kid. He was racing back to meet me. I slowed down, completely satisfied. My great desire was becoming a fact: we two were to shoot it out alone.

On he came, tearing down the slope at a breakneck pace. He was waving a hand wildly. My eyes dilated in horrified amazement and I kicked my horse into a gallop.

"No no! Turn back! Injuns! Injuns! Coming over the ridge, Pop! Run, Pop, run!"

I wheeled and rode at his side. "Billy McQueen! Billy McQueen!" I cried. And had there been no red peril I could have said nothing more, so overwhelming was the terrible discovery.

A rattling volley twisted my head. The ridge was alive with redskins and the whistling lead told me they were armed with rifles. Before I could about face my horse went down, hurling me over his head. The snapping of my right arm close to the shoulder sounded as loud as a pistol shot. Barely had I struck the ground before Billy McQueen was trying to lift me up. I yelled a warning, but it was not necessary. The boy's horse did not run away, but mine did. McQueen swiftly estimated the distance to be covered by the onrushing Indians. He yelled at his horse and the intelligent animal streaked away to the broken ground.

"Too close for us to ride double and make it, Pop," he said.

"Billy McQueen, the Crazy Kid!" I gasped as I tried to turn on my right side and draw my left hand gun.

"Too bad, Pop," he shrilly cried. "Worse, that I should fetch you to this. I said one more fling and I'd quit, win or lose. Raw hell, though, to make you lose."

He jerked my guns loose and kneeled astride of my hips as I rested on my left side. He placed my guns on the grass and drew his own weapons. My range of vision took in half of the semi-circle now seeking to envelope us.

"Prop me up!" I commanded. "Give me my guns!"

"Don't fret, Pop. Better for me to use 'em! Don't worry. They'll never git you alive. I'll save a shot for you." Then he shot twice rapidly, with his right hand gun. He crowed with delight, but I could not see what he had scored.

"On your left!" I yelled as a warrior broke from the string and charged in to count a coup.

Now for the first time I had a sample o the wonderful marksmanship of Billy Mc-Queen, alias the Crazy Kid. He dropped the buck at seventy yards.

"Don't fret, Pop," he encouraged. And he twisted his head to grin mournfully at me. "They sha'n't hurt you. I've saved a shot for you."

"For God's sake, save one for yourself, Billy," I groaned.

"Playing the game as it lays." Bang! bang! Once with each gun. A pony went down on my side. A yell of rage sounded behind me. "This would make Annie feel mighty nervous." Then as if talking to himself, "Annie's mighty prim." And he blew the smoke from the long barrels, and held the guns half raised and darted his gaze from side to side.

Some of the enemy were discharging their rifles, and some of the lead struck close. Had they stalked us afoot they must have bagged us quickly.

"Trying a long one to show 'em what the best shot 'tween the Arkansas and the Upper Missouri can do," he told me. He slowly leveled a gun and aimed to the north and fired. His crow of delight told me he had scored. The howl of rage also testified to his accuracy. A swarm of bullets swept about us and I received one in my left leg. He felt me jerk convulsively and sprawled over me lengthwise to shield me. In this position, his head over my feet, and his outstretched arms making one think of a swimmer, he emptied his guns and caught up mine. "Always a last shot for you, Pop, don't worry."

The two guns commenced talking rapidly. I saw the Indians, over the sides of their ponies, swerving away from us. They only had to keep on coming to bag us. As they gave ground Billy McQueen shifted to his knees and feverishly reloaded his guns and commenced on mine.

"If we git loose, Billy, you keep riding north. First one I ever let go," I told him. Not that I had the slightest idea I ever would ride a horse, or chase a lawbreaker again.

"Sorry to fetch it to you, Pop," he mumbled. "Got reckless when Annie liked another feller. She liked him 'cause he was something of a devil. And she that prim and precise. But don't you fret. Saving shot in left-hand gun for you. If they git me first, grab it. Ah! Now some action."

And again he stretched out over me.

They had briefly pow-wowed and peeped into their medicine bags, and were racing down on us, howling like starved timber wolves. I could see only a portion of the line, but it was enough. Now I had a chance to watch the marksmanship of the young reprobate I had so longed to meet up with. He strung the line west of us with six shots, and dropped the gun and commenced on the line in the east. On my side wounded ponies were bolting, and several figures were sprawling in the grass.

THE six shots to the east slackened the rifle fire from that quarter. Instantly McQueen was taking advantage of the lull to stuff lead in his guns, although my weapons remained fully loaded. He leaned against me a bit and had time to give me an encouraging grin.

"If I wasn't so —— helpless!" I groaned.

"Never mind, Pop. Best I do the shooting while I last. Saying 'good-by' pretty soon. Just roll on your back and grab either of your guns if I cash in first." His blue eyes were blazing with the fires of battle, but blood was flecking his lips.

"You're hit, son!"

"Two, three times. Lawd, what would Annie think if she saw such works! Big heap medicine man making signs. Ah, now it *is* coming. My gambling was just to cover up t'other stuff, Pop. Sorry. Good-by."

He crouched close and did that which will always make my old heart ache. He kissed me on the forehead as if he had been my own son. He grinned sheepishly as he drew himself up on his knees. Poor lad. He had banked on one girl, "prim and precise," and had lost her because he showed no streak of deviltry.

"Good-by, son," I managed to say. "Would to God I had had such a son, even if they called him the Crazy Kid!"

He nodded; then the gentleness of his blue eyes was replaced by a feral light and his lips were drawn back in the snarl of a cornered wild beast. And God! How he worked those two guns! He emptied them and grabbed up my brace, and even in the terrible climax he paused to make sure both were fully loaded, so he could save one shot for me. He began working the second brace when the converging lines were at close range.

"One for you, Pop!" he cried, and the blood was filling his mouth.

Something hit me and I drifted far. Whisky, strangling me, marked my return to consciousness. I was surrounded by my posse. Jansen was holding my head in his lap. He congratulated me:

"You bagged him like you always said you would, Boss."

I rolled my head and stared at the silent figure of the Crazy Kid. Then I told Jansen, "I have lost a son, Jansen. God give him rest."

"Good land, Boss! We figgered you'd captured him and was jumped by the reds!"

"He could have escaped. He sent his horse away. He came back to warn me at the first sign of danger. You boys must have come just as I was hit for the second time."

"In the nick of time, Boss. They got him through the head as we came out of that —— blind gulch and opened fire. His cocked revolver was within an inch of your temple."

One of the men ranging through the grass loudly yelled, "The young hellion bagged twelve, and no knowing how many he wounded! Great glory!"

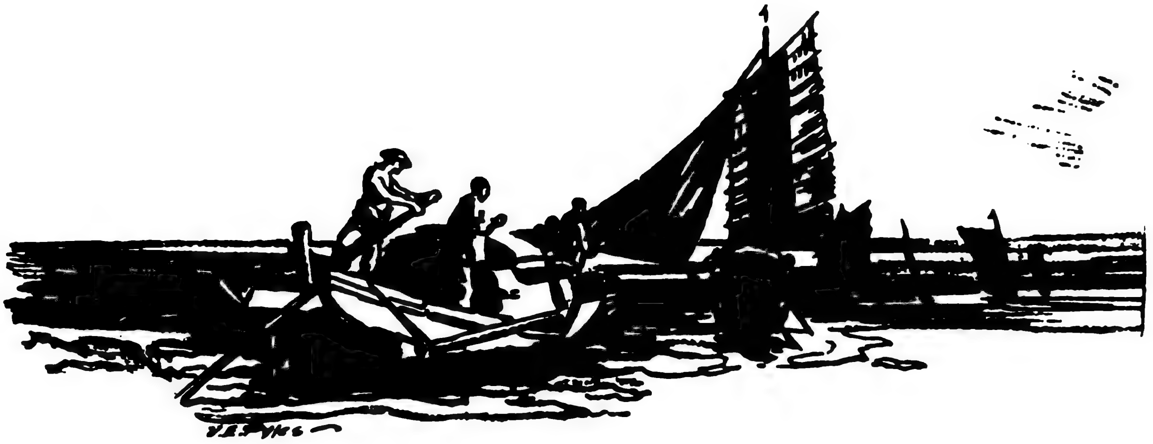
"You boys listen. The Crazy Kid is buried here. Billy McQueen went back East. I can depend on you?" That I could depend on them is proven by this writing, the first to tell the truth about the Kid and Billy McQueen.

We buried him out there on the edge of the broken land. The red men, who killed him, accepted him as they found him, the bravest of the brave, because he remained to die when he could have escaped. And until some easterner removed it as a curio, a war-bonnet, to be worn only by a chief who had carried the pipe on four big paths, was pegged down on that lonely mound. The gift from a big chief to the young chief he had killed.

Part One of a Two-Part Story

Rajah Treasure

By HUBBARD HUTCHINSON



CHAPTER I

SHAHLI-MAR sat upon the mat at the entrance of her grandfather's large house, in the center of the village, and uneasily chewed betel-nut. It was the "hour when feet become silent." Across the village she could hear the complaining groan of the gates as old Yunthu rolled them shut for the night, and lifted his tilting voice in the charm that "sealed" them against the malevolent little forest nâts. Through the curtain of the swift-fallen night, other sounds wove inconsequent threads; Yannoo the cow breathed chuffily under the elevated bamboo floor where Shahli-Mar sat; from behind the toddy-palm screening the nearest house flowed a nasal murmur as a woman sang to her children; a white aigret, wading keen-eyed somewhere in the darkness of the river reeds, shrieked a thin, sudden screech upon the blue-veiled stillness.

Shahli-Mar watched the last radiance fade into the deep sky. Against it the fantastic pinnacles of the *kyoung* (monastery), leaped up like still black flames in a furious crescendo of narrowing roofs. The bigger stars were already dropping closer over the warm, still Burmese earth.

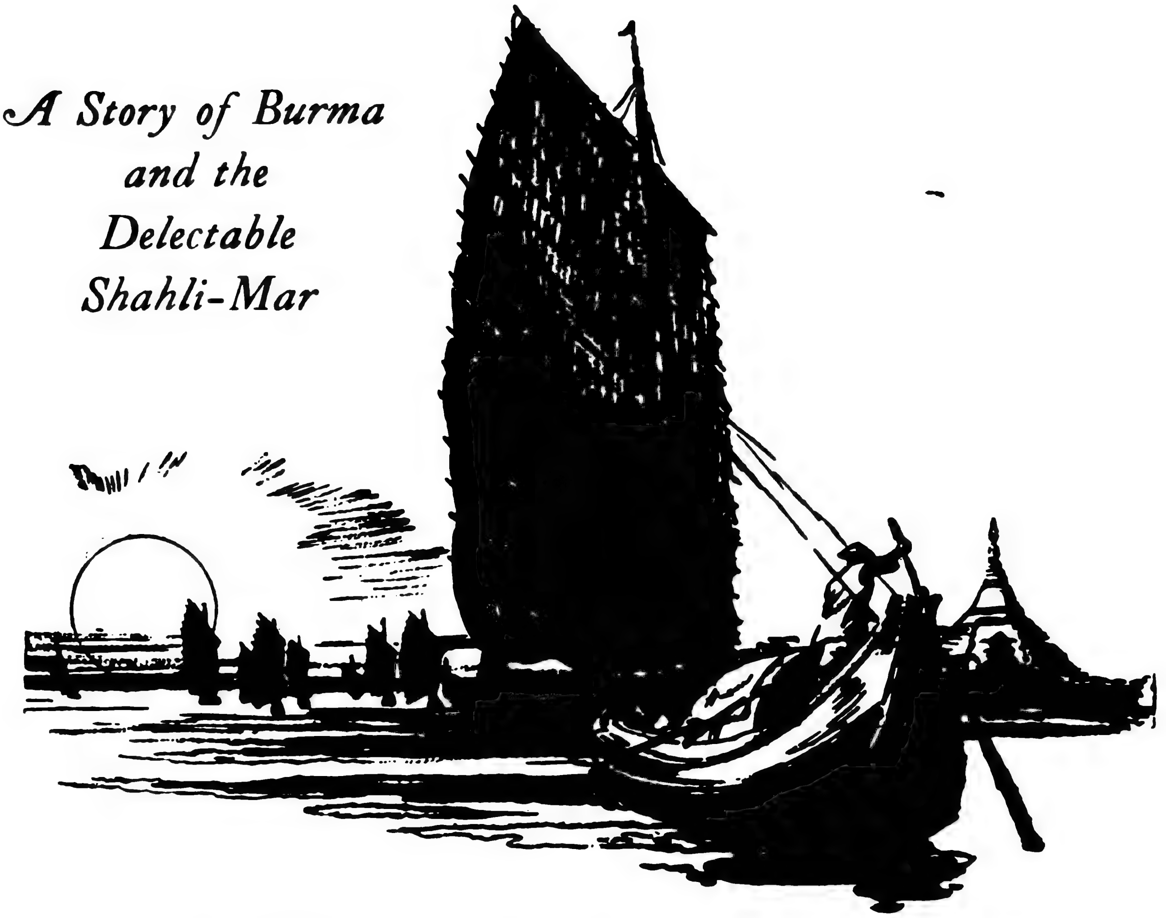
For a moment all sounds ceased; then, gravely, beautifully, from the monastery a gong sounded, melodiously swelling through the silence, as light might swell through darkness, a pure sonorous mellow tone. Through it followed others, higher and lower, raying out slowly or quickly till the curtain of dark warm silence glowed and pulsed and trembled with them. It was the *piyashikoh*, the Buddhist amen, marking the end of the day for the monks.

As the many-toned utterance ebbed away, she rose silently, spat out the red juice of the betel-nut, and went inside the house. It was the hour when the very young return home. Pyang-Dhal would be coming now.

Alone in the darkness—her grandfather had gone for his evening's mild gambling and pipe of *gunghah* with other ancients—she patted the smooth coiled side-knot of her hair, then impatiently lit the Cooper oil lamp, bought with vast pride in the *serai* at Yandoon, and sat down with a small hand-mirror. The yellow light hovered on the folds of her wrapped skirt of changeable silk, red and orange, the yellow scarf that rippled above her short white jacket.

Her face, oval and finely proportioned,

A Story of Burma and the Delectable Shahli-Mar



lacked entirely the high cheekbones of the Burman, and her eyes tilted but slightly at the corners, were merely prolonged rather, with a faint, beautiful upward curve. Her nose was short and straight, her lips full and clearly drawn. The face had but one blemish, a curious small triangular scar below the left eye; an old clear scar such as one might acquire in infancy.

She was in full Burmese regalia. On ankles and wrists and arms clinked bracelets of silver; on her index fingers shone rings of rough gold, set with small rubies. Only her ears were unadorned. She had at the age of four refused ear-lugs with such screams that the officiating *hpungi* had lifted ceremonial robes and fled, and her adoring grandfather had never repeated the performance.

FOR the past ten days, since her return from Yandoon, Pyang-Dhal had taken post under the banyan tree that spraddled above her cousin's silk-stall in the bazaar, where Shahli-Mar frequently sat and did a brisk business. He had looked at her fixedly with huge dark eyes, incredibly solemn. At first she had mistaken it for mockery, remembering how only last year they had fished the little stream and rioted with the village children. So she had made rude gestures, and giggled. But he had only stared the harder, so that she suddenly knew, and ran away that morning from her silk stall. At the end of six days she glanced at him, on the eighth, looked a moment. Today, half in exasperation, half in sheer boredom, she had smiled ravishingly, thereby fulfilling most explicitly the etiquette of the Burmese courtship that would bring him, scented and eager, to her house that night.

And now, though she wished she had not, she characteristically wasted no time in regrets, but smeared her cheeks with white paste and waited. Hardly had she put away the little box, when soft footfalls sounded, hesitatingly, among the rustling pyingado leaves below. A thump, followed by an aggrieved snort from Yannoo, and a low stream of instant invective, abruptly checked. Shahli-Mar's hands flew to her mouth and she rocked silently. He had stumbled over the cow. Assuredly it was his first wooing. She fixed her eyes upon a small opening in the bamboo floor, large enough to admit a man's hand.

Came a preparatory cough, then a voice,

light and rather wavering, began to sing softly. Shahli-Mar's eyes opened wide—this was indeed a wooing—the voice rose impassionate upon the last stanza and there appeared through the hole a hand, slim and brown, a ring of flat silver on the thumb. It raised itself importunately, the thumb back, fingers spread, looking curiously young and defenseless, open before her.

Now, the Burmese village etiquette, like that of small villages elsewhere, is very exact. If she laid her hand upon the outstretched fingers, she was inevitably betrothed. If she struck them with her fan (in the old days it had been a sharp knife, and the unloved sometimes lost a finger), he would go away. Then it might, and somehow she felt that in this case it would, begin all over again.

The entreating stretched fingers began to tremble a little, and from below came a cavernous sigh. She hesitated; then, with a quick shake of her head, bent down, eyes sparkling, and broke the village etiquette to smithereens.

"Pyang-Dhal," she called softly, "come up. I would talk with thee."

A gasp, the hand vanished, and in a soft swish of silk and a patter of bare feet, a boy appeared in the doorway, dumbfounded dismay on his young face, his slim bare torso gleaming with oil. One agitated hand twisted his skirt of red silk, and words gushed from him.

"What is this? Thou hast—thou hast departed from the rule. My hand—it was neither grasped nor struck—my—"

She checked him with a lifted arm, pale, almsot white in the lamp light.

"Peace, Pyang-Dhal. I do what I do. Sit, and we shall talk."

"But—but—" the boy, his formula outraged, stuttered helplessly. Then, as she smiled, he flung himself beside her.

"Oh white flower in the forest of my heart—" he began the "Invocation of Lovers," but she frowned, and tapped his wrist with her fan.

"Oh, no, no! Do not smother me with fine speeches. Let us talk sensibly." She looked at him curiously, smiling into his discomfited face. "What is this madness of love that has changed a friend into a large-eyed cow who stares at the moon? It was otherwise not so long ago, when thou pursued me with dung-cakes by the river, and we chased the gate-keeper's pigs."

The boy sulked. "I have stood before thee in the bazaar. I have watched ten days. Thou gavest a token. I came. And now I am mocked. Nay," he rushed on as she would interrupt, "it is *thou* who has changed. Since thou went to live a year in Yandoon and saw the large bazaars and the Great River (The Irawaddy), and—yes—and learned to speak *Englishi* from the foreign priest, thou art wholly strange."

She surveyed him calmly. "And thou, Pyang-Dhal, art very young."

He writhed, and half rose. "I shall not stay to be mocked. And—and—it is not seemly to talk thus, alone to a girl in her home—unbetrothed."

"True." Shahli-Mar deliberately picked a white cheroot from the bundle beside the lamp, and smoked. "But how more foolish if I struck thy hand. Thou, or another, would come again. Listen, Pyang-Dhal." Her voice grew very gentle. "Thou art my friend, then let me talk to thee."

"Thou dost not love me," he muttered, his voice harsh with pain. She smoked slowly, her eyes fixed on the darkness beyond the open door. Finally she spoke, softly.

"I will tell—what no one knows. I went, as thou knowest, to Yandoon, almost a season ago, and dwelt with my cousins awhile. They sold lacquer and silk in a *serai* larger than our village. There were people from many lands, and I learned much. There were many *Englishi*, red and white, with bold eyes. Some were fools, but some were kind. The heathen priest was kind. He taught me *Englishi*, coming to the bazaar a little while each day, and for that teaching I gave him a little silk, or a lacquer box. Then, when I was to come home, I went to the Great Pagoda in Yandoon, and took gifts, and prayed before the Bodhisat. He was a large Bodhisat, covered with gold. And I prayed to him to show me what I should do, for I wanted to come home, for something so impelled me."

She lowered her voice, and snapped her fingers to ward off any listening evil spirits. The boy hastily muttered a charm, staring with open mouth.

"That night I had a vision. A voice like a gong sounded. 'Go to Rangoon' it said, and—I was there, and the streets were all filled with many people, and paved with silver, and all worked for the *Englishi* for great pay. And then I walked alone beside a great pagoda in trouble of mind and darkness, so that I cried. And as I cried, One came to me, out of the west, red and gold, with a strong sweet voice, telling me to be comforted, and," she checked abruptly, looking down at her hand, "then I woke."

Pyang-Dhal sucked in his breath sharply. "Tch! Tch! A vision, Shahli-Mar. Hast told the *hpungi* of this?"

"Wherefore?" She flicked the ash from her white cheroot scornfully. "He would tell me I must give many bowls of rice to the monastery, and curry for his fat belly. Nay. I go to Rangoon."

He regarded her with real awe, edging a little away.

"Alone?"

"Perhaps. Some of my grandfather's people are there. It does not matter. I make a pilgrimage."

"When—when dost thou go?"

"Oh, soon, soon. My grandfather says that since *sahibs* (white men) came to that place in the forest between our village and Kim-Popal, to dig in the ground for gold, many will come back with strange machines for digging. That I want to see; so I shall return. My grandfather says the *sahibs* are the fathers of fools to dig in the ground there. He is very old, and knows the secrets of the earth."

"The people of Kim-Popal are the sons of thieves", returned the boy angrily, his mind following a moment the latest suggestion. "They stole two cows from my father and as many from the gate-keeper. Some day . . ."

But she ceased to listen as he worked himself up, orientalwise, into a passion against the people of Kim-Popal, whom they would one day wipe out. She had heard it all before. And, presently, he stopped abruptly, and looked at her as she sat, small and subtly made and beautiful, her skin, in the soft wash of the lamplight, ivory-pale. So still she sat, so far her eyes seemed to look into the darkness that he felt a moment of fear. Timidly, he touched her hand.

"Shahli-Mar," he muttered, "if you go, I shall go with you."

She turned, looked at him slowly, then smiled a little.

"As thou wilt. Thou art my friend. But—" she shook her head. "I cannot love thee. I would be free to travel this beautiful land." She glanced round the little smoky room of bamboo, with its painted wooden chests for clothing, its low tray and cups. "I am myself. I will love no man until—" She left the sentence unfinished, and rose quickly. "Thou must go before my grandfather returns."

Orientals rarely kiss; he took her hand, and laid it against his throat.

"Nevertheless I go with thee," he stammered, "perhaps thou wilt love me." He hurried softly out of the house.

SHE stood hearing his steps grow fainter in the rustling leaves. Her own words sank slowly in her. "Myself, myself." They seemed to expand and mingle with the half-pleasant, half-painful feelings of which, since her year's absence in Yandoon, she was so sharply aware.

For Shahli-Mar knew herself to be *stingha*, as the Malaysians say, which is, half-caste. Of her parents she knew nothing. And of Keshoo, her grandfather, scarcely more. He had brought her a year old to his village of Dhang, reappearing after twenty years of absence, and had taken up the life of the village again as if he had left it the day before. And because they were Orientals, and perhaps because he was accounted wealthy, and succeeded his father as headman, the people asked no questions where he volunteered none; neither about the light-skinned baby nor the rumor of his unfair dismissal from government service, the geologic survey, as a young man. Because he was kindly and just, they trusted him; because he had traveled and acquired knowledge, they brought him their little troubles and obeyed him.

So she had grown up, adored by the village, some hundred odd families. Keshoo would go ranging the country for days or weeks—he had gotten the habit as a young man and loved it—leaving her with cousins till she was old enough to go with him from time to time. From the priests she learned to read and to write. She had the most complete freedom. Only on one thing was her grandfather adamant. When youths began to hover round her adolescent beauty, he smilingly, but with a look that quenched the most ardent, shook his head. "Not yet." And to her inevitable question when a village child had spoken pointedly of her whiter skin—it happened when she was six—he had told her a wonderful tale of a wood sprite who had laid a white flower beside her when she slept and so spread a spell of particular blessing on her body. But the child's mother was visited, and no villager repeated the error. To later and maturer questionings he returned an invariable, "Not yet—when the time comes." And being young and immensely happy, she almost forgot. As the daughter of the revered headman, the subtle "differentness" that inclosed her was less noticeable, less keen.

But since her return from Yandoon, this was changed. Characteristically he had not opposed her going when a cousin, returned with pomp from the large trading town, had proposed a visit; he had come himself several times to see her. Back again in Dhang—the cousin had died suddenly of fever—she found herself longing for the larger horizon, the many people, the English priest who had taught her English. It made her restless. Moreover, though she had to admit that not a single surreptitious wooer had moved her, she found herself an old maid. For among the Burmese, one is an advanced spinster at twenty.

All these thoughts, vague and blended, mingled in her mind round a deep wistful longing—a longing stirred into acute realization by her "vision." It lay deep in her imagination, shining, a little terrifying in its glory, to be looked at with secret delight, obliquely.

But tonight, undressing slowly in the darkness, she looked it full in the face, so that she felt the color rising in her cheeks.

Assuredly, she would go to Rangoon.

CHAPTER II

THE Bibby liner, in a light like diffused pearls and a low mist that beaded hawser and ratline, nosed her way up river, her siren voicing the hoarse call of a steamer making port through familiar waters. Out of the low mist eddying round her flanks, rose the "churl, churl, churl" of the unseen water that mingled with the throb of the screw in a continuous, basic sound from which other noises rose now and then out of the white vapor. The impudent toot of a Lascar manned trader, the sharp nasal calls of river-men. The air, still cool and fresh, carried the exuberant odor of the land, moist and rich, tingling delighted nerves in nostrils inured to sea-spray.

Dan Starrett, standing solitary by the bow rail, sniffed eagerly, and leaned his long body forward. His white linen shone with the neat faultlessness only possible to tropical garments which have never encountered the *dhobi*, his skin was ruddy with new tan, and he looked right and left to catch a first glimpse of land. Burma; confused childish images tumbled through his mind, a white cheroot big as a smoke-stack, pagodas (gold beehives with spires on them); a road (presumably to Mandalay) stretching straight and narrow to the horizon, with flying fishes laying along it like sparrows. "The country lies along the Bay of Bengal, with a population of 10,189,000, and an annual export of £122,188 and . . ." His recent reading contributed details, but he preferred the childish images.

Upon the steerage deck below, a panorama of awakening life spread before him, and he grinned, with a sudden raying out of little lines from the corners of his eyes, at the spectacle of a fifteen year old Madrassai mother trying to nurse three voracious babies at once.

The pearl-colored light spread; a great flaming of thin red streamers kindled in the sky over the starboard beam; the mist drew up in vanishing spirals, and by the time the three babies had been hidden away in the endless folds of their mother's yellow *sari*, the long wide stretch of river lay revealed in the growing brilliance.

Dan leaned on the rail and looked, aware of disappointment. It might have been any reach of the lower Mississippi, he thought; the low green distant banks, the river, chocolate-colored and smooth. Ordinary.

Then into his range of vision came a small blue rowboat, the shape of a new moon, whose naked and orange-turbaned oarsman pushed instead of pulled; then two huge rafts with small bamboo houses on them and breakfast campfires; and an incredible, high-pooped wooden galley, with sails dyed red and purple. As the sun rose higher, rice-paddies caught the light in squares like great plates of glass and toddy palms struck dark accents in the flat plains. No, it was not quite the Mississippi.

Then the river curved, and Dan drew a deep breath. Far away, clear and finely etched, a city spread along the water-front. But above the stipple of white, dominating gloriously the cramped low buildings, something shot up into the air—a giant finger, a golden spire. It sprang in one soaring pinnacle from a low hill. Where its sun-touched edges met the intense cobalt sky, a little line of fire seemed to run to and fro.

Dan stared with lighted eyes, as well he might. For this was the glory of Burma, the Mother Church of a religion older than Jove, the great Shwe Dagon Pagoda, and there is nothing like it in the world.

TWO hours later, he sat upon the terrace of the Minto Mansions Hotel. Samford himself had met the boat, had taken charge of the transfer of the Stuba Gold Dredge No. 14 to one of the godowns where it now lay piece-meal in a forest of crates; had equally taken charge of him and his luggage with a kind of negligent courtesy, and now sprawled at the small table talking of anything but mining; a swarthy, heavy-shouldered man of forty-five, with black eyebrows meeting in a bar across his nose, and a trick of occasional gleaming scrutiny from under drooped lids.

"It's not a bad place, Rangoon, when you're used to it," he was saying, emptying a glass of whisky and soda. "Not Burmese, of course, not half. Too busy for 'em. The Burman's a gentleman of sorts. He won't work. The women will, though, and they run the country. More like Occidentals, eh?" with a swift, dark smile that made him, suddenly, much younger. Dan, watching him keenly, felt, for a moment, some of the charm of this man as he had already felt the power that had enabled him, in an incredibly short time, to organize the great mining company that had reached half round the world and brought the Stuba No. 14 to Rangoon.

Samford refilled his pipe, and jerked with his head toward the hotel. "Sure you'll make out all right here? I can put you up at the club, you know."

"This is fine, thanks. They gave me a room off the garden, ground floor. Seems cool and confortable. Anyhow, I suppose I'll be going into the bush pretty soon, won't I?"

The other puffed, shook out the match before replying.

"Well, I daresay it won't be at once. Matter of fact, there's been a little difficulty getting the right sort of barges for your material, they'll be along in a week or so, though." He laughed at the other's expression. "This is the East, you know, Mr. Starrett. I fear you'll find us lacking in your American 'pep'. But we manage to muddle along."

"Oh," the younger man laughed, "I'm no fire-eating go-getter. I'd like nothing better than to wander round the city. I've never been in the East before. Central America and Chile installation jobs, but never the Orient. I'd like to get a look at the mine-site. Maybe I could get up and back while you're getting the dredges ready."

"It's rather a nasty trip; two days by river, the Irawaddy, then off up the Chang to a little village called Kim-Popal, and inland through the jungle about five miles. I don't think it will be necessary for you to go up before you take the dredge to install it." Along the drawling easy voice ran a faint edge of authority. The other's independence bristled at once to it, but he dismissed the feeling. After all, it was Samford's business. Turning the talk, he began asking the engineer how he had found the mine, and the other, in graphic, reticent phrases, outlined the story; how he had mined in various parts of the British Empire as a young man; how he had always been attracted by the old legend, current from Karachi to Bhamo, of a great lode of gold somewhere in the Burmese interior whence the old Burmese Kings and the Bengalese Rajahs had drawn enormous wealth in the 17th century.

"Only fools laugh at native legends," he said. "I was out here for years before the war. Had a bit of time on my hands, and went off into the bush, all over the lot." Dan knew the rest—how Samford had secured capital in India and Burma and even England—on the strength of his fine engineering reputation, the knowledge that gold lay somewhere in the Burmese jungles, and the fascinating force of the old Burmese legend.

"Seventy-five cents per cubic yard," said Samford, "at a very conservative estimate. Gravel sheets, under forest. I've cleared, and pitted pretty extensively. That high a grade, and the fact we may encounter water, made it possible for you to be here, Mr. Starrett," he wound up, with again a flicker of the dark quick smile. "Otherwise you'd have been too far away, and much too expensive." He rose, beckoned the hovering Chinese boy, scrawled a "chit."

"I'll push along," he said. "The Bank of

Burma act as our financial agents; our offices are in their building. You might come along when you've your gear unpacked, and meet the chaps in the office. I'll give you a desk there. We'll take tiffin at the club. There's really a very decent crowd here—tennis, golf, and polo—you ride, I fancy," as he looked over Starrett's long athletic figure, the wide shoulders and narrow loins of the sportsman.

"A bit. Knocked round two or three seasons."

"Deuce you have, Sir Edward'll be after you with a pony before you can unpack. Follow Dalhousie St. up to Raeburn; anybody tell you where the bank is. Well—cheerio," with a wave of his stick he strode off, tall, careless, greeting one person after another, as he disappeared among the trees of the cantonment; a well known and rather commanding figure.

DAN went to his room amused and puzzled. The final letter which had fetched him with the Stuba No. 14 had suggested urgency; the Irawaddy was in flood for three months; thereafter it would be impossible, for a year, to reach the mine-site with barges; the small tributary Chang would not float them. Hence the speed with which he had hustled to the coast and across the Pacific, reaching Rangoon just six weeks after that letter had arrived.

Well, doubtless it was the East, and the English in the East, he thought, tossing shirts out of his trunk. This oblique and social approach to business he had encountered in South America; one expected it, somehow, from Latins. He thought of the way his bristling little boss would have plunged in, had the room strewn with blue prints in an hour, and sent him packing up river next day. But, after all, he had six weeks before the river began to sink.

The sounds of the alien city, penetrating faintly to the cantonment, tantalized his ready curiosity; the nasal drawl of street vendors; the cries of the men driving the tums tums; an occasional, staccato little tune, piped out of nowhere. He finished his unpacking hurriedly, and went out. He strolled along watching the colorful crowds, the small shops, sniffing the exotic pungent air. And always, glimpsed distantly, lifting over the powdery pepper trees, ending a long vista of streets, the great spire of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda beckoned to him. He found his steps turning toward it time and again, and he deliberately walked away, and turned his eyes from the distant shining gold; he wanted to put off, to anticipate as long as possible, the sight of it, the glittering confusion of its pinnacles—as a child out of a plateful of candies will put aside for last that which it loves best.

The mighty shrine vastly eluded his little strategy. On its hill above the city, it was unescapable as the sun. To Dan it lifted its giant yellow finger and beckoned.

Not until almost sunset, however, did he find himself free to obey its summons. Luncheon at the club proved a thing of numerous introductions and endless whisky and soda. He was presented to some of the officers of the mining company, fever-yellowed army veterans, long-bred civil servants; men lean and spent looking, for the most part, but with eyes and gestures of energy. Sir Edward turned out to be a gentle, slender man of fifty, erect as a lance, with white moustaches and an expression of such deep sadness that the smile which greeted Samford's mention of polo seemed almost out of place. Dan found himself watching the thin countenance.

There was much pleasant chaffing. "Mr. Starrett's keen as mustard, Sir Edward." Samford winked across the table. "He wants to go off in the bush at once."

"Plenty of time for that, Mr. Starrett, you'll get fed up with it fast enough. Better come around for polo day after tomorrow. You must meet my daughter, Vivian."

He had a full week before he knew it, thanks partly to Samford, but even more to the kindly hospitality of the English in the Orient. The talk around the table touched everything but mining, and he realized, suddenly—a shock to any American encountering it the first time—that the English do not mix social relations and business. They talked of politics, of sports, of the country and its people, and were faintly amused at his interest.

"The Shwe Dagon? Oh yes, topping place, all the tourists make for it first off. What? Bless you dear man, I've never been up to it. They made a law a while ago you have to take off your boots and socks at the entrance; you climb hundreds of steps, you know, among filthy beggars; it's a 'holy place;' oh, it's ripping of course."

They sat far into the afternoon. He evaded numerous friendly offers to show him round, and escaped alone through Dalhousie Park, wanting, as always in a new place, the validity of his own first impressions. He sauntered toward that mighty gold finger, gleaming incandescently from its hill. The level sunlight, flaring toward the west, cut surfaces into sharp, exciting relief, a *bhisti*, scattering his last goatskin of water through the low dust; Burmese girls, their silk skirts flashing rose and green; Chinese merchants dully blue; striding English officers, with tanned faces, brass a-glitter; tattooed Chins, bare-legged coolies—all bore the curious stamp of the late orange sunlight; touched with high relief, sunk in questioning shadow. Dan, his eyes darting among the colors, grinned in sheer joy.

THUS he reached the leogryphs that squat each side the South Approach to the shrine, collosal creatures with three foot mouths. A small boy whisked off shoes and socks, and gingerly, with unaccustomed bare feet, he began mounting the steps. For an instant his mind crawled with suggestion—centuries of naked feet climbing, feet young and vigorous, old and scaly. Then he forgot them in the spectacle before him. The stairs stretched up and up, an arcade roofed with carved teak; an elongated country fair of booths; gold leaf for shrines; gongs for prayer, marigolds for offerings—fat cubes of incense for altars—all that ministered to worship; and as well, syrupy sweetmeats and rolls of silk and bundles of enormous cheroots. A slow stream of people eddied up and down. He climbed endlessly.

Then he came out, as from a noisy tunnel, upon the still, vast platform, and the Shwe Dagon rose before him, solid, immense, like a collosal golden bubble pulled up peak-wise at the top; or a perfect chord of music, rising, swelling outward, narrowing, as it swept up in a diminishing diameter, to die away in one far, dazzling point high against the purple sky.

As he looked, head back and hat snatched off, the sunlight lifted slowly upon the great shape, slid up like a bright sheath, hung an instant on the pinnacle, and vanished. The sun had gone. A blue gauze at once unrolled over the platform, the myriad pointed shrines that ringed the pagoda, the moving figures. A rain of bell-tones, bronze and silver, deep and sharp, stippled the darkening hour, the *piashikoh* of sunset.

He moved round the huge base, the pavement hot upon his feet; priests in classic yellow robes and shaved heads; men and women kneeling, motionless, in prayer; two girls gossiping happily on the steps of a shrine. It was peace, he told himself, but active peace, not passive—out of the great shrine flowed a vast energy, effortless as a mighty river. It held him; he responded to it.

Without knowing where he walked, he dreamed on, taking a narrow way between crumbling shrines that led him toward the outer edge of the platform where the family temples rot or grow with the family's prosperity or decay—a strange wilderness of silent, deserted *dagobas*.

Then he circled a shrine and came upon three figures struggling in the twilight, silently. He watched them incredulously, a sallow, big, half naked man, facing him, head lowered, arms round a furiously fighting girl; a slim boy pecking futilely at the man's back.

For a moment the scene hung detached before him, so deeply had the pagoda's spell wrapt him; the struggling group was just another picture of strangeness, no more incredible than the rest—for a moment. Then something clicked in his brain, actuality broke through to tightened muscles; on crisped toes he leaped silently toward the group.

The man saw him an instant too soon; his head lifted, snarling; he flung the girl spinning against a wall. His hand dropped, a quick curved gesture, to his hip, rose flashing to meet Dan's own upon its wrist. Their bodies locked an instant, the two arms struggling and stiff above. Then a blurred arc, a shift, and the knife clattered on the stones and the man, meeting Dan's straight right drive, tumbled like a sack beside it.

Something of unreality still clung round him as he stood tense, watching, panting a little. It had been so swift, so silent. The darkness was coming out of the corners so fast. The man at his feet moaned. The girl ran toward Dan. He had to stoop to meet her eyes, dark and blazing. Her smooth Burmese coiffure had been shaken down, and her hair hung round her face.

As she looked at him Dan saw her face deepen suddenly into wonder and awe. Her eyes shifted to his hair, the last light faintly copper upon it. She gasped.

"My vision" stuttered Shahli-Mar. "One coming, red-gold—oh, mother of Maitreya, it is so. My vision—it is fulfilled!"

Dan sensed some great excitement, and regretfully shook his head.

"Damn—I don't know a single word."

At his voice she listened sharply, then smiled, and Dan peering in illusive dusk, suddenly realized a shadowy beauty. Then she spoke slowly.

"Thee Lord Buddha send you to help Shahli-Mar." She laid her hand on his chest. "You are good—help Shahli-Mar."

"Um—that—that's all right." Of course it was all part of the spell, the gigantic spell of the place. He pointed to the prostrate figure. "Who's that?"

Shahli-Mar kicked it with a slim bare foot. "He is —— damn fool," she stated. "He follow me. I come with Pyang-Dhal—pray. Pilgrimage. He was drank, I think, yes. Now he die, let us hope." She seized Dan's hand in her own, a strong, warm little grasp. "Come, come away."

"But," he expostulated, "we can't leave him here, can we? How about the police—or—or somebody?"

"Oh, per-lice? Noah, noah. Leeve him." She tugged again. Dan yielded. It was pure fantasy. He followed docilely, as she hurried, in the deepening darkness, through a maze of shrines, halting finally before one of them. He felt the girl staring intently at him.

"You *Englishi*—Keristian?" She asked abruptly.

"What? Oh—no. I'm not English. I'm American."

"Ahmeerikhan." She pondered it a moment, then sank to her knees, pulling him down with her. He found flowers in his hand; realized he knelt before a dim white figure; heard her voice rise and fall softly. The boy knelt too. And so deep had grown the glamour that he would not have been surprised had that white figure risen from its shrine, and laid hands of blessing upon his head.

Then the girl rose and came close to him.

"Thatt is good, let us hope. You pray Buddha. Now you belong Shahli-Mar," she said astoundingly. "What your name—where your house?"

He told her; she repeated it. "Dhan-star-et, Dhan-star-et. You live at Big *Pythayat* (hostelry; really a resthouse). I come from far, indeed. The Irawaddy, then the little Chang. Thee Lord Buddha send me to Shwe Dagon. Now I go back with Pyang-Dhal."

"Is he your man?"

He could just make out a superb gesture. "Pyang-Dhal—he is ver' young boy. Not talk *Englishi*, yes. He says he likes me—oah, yes, so he came with me." It had grown dark. Again he felt her intent, searching look; had an uncanny feeling that she could see perfectly well. Then she picked up his hand, and placed it, suddenly, at her throat.

"Dhan-star-et," she said quickly. "I see you again. Oah, yes, let us hope, Thee Lord Buddha say so. Goodbye, and thank you veree much." And with that absurd, parroted, conventional little phrase, she simply melted into the darkness, the boy with her. They were gone.

He found his way back to the open platform. People walked softly by him; there was a hum of voices; distantly a gong sounded. Towering above him the Pagodacut a gigantic bell shape against the glittering sky.

Dan sat down hard upon the near step of a shrine, felt mechanically for a cigarette, and in a voice stupid with amazement, invoked the alien dark.

"Well, my God!" he said.

CHAPTER III

THROUGH French doors at each end, the ballroom of the Rangoon Club terminates in two terraces. Comfortable chairs and little tables cover the front one, which looks off into Dalhousie Park, all dim green and fire-fly lights. Here, embalmed in respectability, sit the eldest officers and fattest dowagers, in order of rank and corpulence, comfortably gossiping.

The back terrace, however, by a law antedating Thebaw, is sacred to the first couple that acquire it at the end of each dance. No lights obtrude, and under pleasant trellises a simpering plaster Venus disregards a bench.

Here sat Vivian Mount and Samford, their white clothes a single faint smear on the darkness, their cigarettes puncturing the dusk. Presently Vivian spoke.

"I'll have to get back. I've gone and engaged the next dance with your ginger-headed American."

"What do you think of him?" Samford made no move as the girl half rose, and she settled back again, flicking out the cigarette.

She laughed; "He's awfully American, isn't he? He seems rather fun, and of course they all dance divinely. Why?"

"He's getting to be a bit of a problem."

"Dear me, that's a bit rapid for two weeks isn't it? But then, they always do everything faster than anyone else. Drugs or native women, Allan?"

"Don't be absurd. Starrett's a very decent chap." He thought a moment, then said. "Do you think he likes you?"

It so surprised her she sat up suddenly straight. "What a quaint question. Why yes, I think he does. He's been around quite a bit. Father dotes on him because of his polo. Yes, he likes me—though I must say it's not very flattering. Apparently I remind him of someone, insisted we'd met somewhere. I'm sure not." She peered at him curiously in the darkness. "Why, Allan?"

For answer he put his arm round her and looked earnestly down her face.

"I wish you'd be particularly nice to him."

Her bewilderment grew. "Of course—but *why?*"

"I can't explain fully, now." He chose his words. "But—I don't want him to leave Rangoon. He's been pestering to go up river and look over the mine-site. I don't want that. It would be bad for—for all of our interests—your father's—the whole plan."

"You mean—" she was watching him intently now, aware of a swift baffling feeling she had felt from time to time and had carefully banished. Samford caught it, and caressed her dark, close hair.

"I mean, simply, that there are other interests there I don't want any outsider nosing into at present. Especially an American with mining knowledge. Certain developments. It's awkward for me; I can't keep him from going up to look over the ground—issue orders, and all that. But—" he emphasized each word gently—"someone else might. If he were made to feel he'd nothing to lose by waiting, if he became so interested in—er—Rangoon that he'd be content to stand by a while . . . "

She suddenly seized his ears, and turned his head fully toward her.

"In other words, Allan Samford, you want me to vamp your copper-headed friend and keep him out of mischief. Really, you're incredible." Her tone was mocking and tender. "But I'll do it."

"It's devilish important," he urged, "it may mean everything to us. That's all I can say. You'll have to trust me." He rose and put his arms deliberately round her. "You do trust me, don't you, Viv?"

Something like swift fire swept away her bantering smile, and her eyes searched his face in the dusky light.

"I don't know, Allan" her voice trembled a little, but the tone was even, slow. "Trust —what's that?" Suddenly her arms circled his neck, her hands buried themselves in his thick hair, her voice ran out in a rushing whisper. "Oh, I love you, Allan—I love you so."

After a little silence, he whispered, "Vivian," and drew her closer. "Vivian."

He felt her tremble, but her head, pressed against his shoulder, shook.

"No—no Allan. Please—don't ask me—again. Not . that . . . I somehow . . . can't."

Her eyes were closed. But Samford's, above them, stared into the darkness, a faint frown on his forehead.

NEARLY three weeks later, Dan sat coatless in his room at the hotel, the plans of the Stuba No. 14 before him, the complex designs which, to his eye, spelled processes transforming the dredge from a warehouse of iron pieces into a monstrous unit. A ship more fantastic than any caravel, which, like the fabulous boats of Phäi, could voyage slowly across dry land; proceeding in a small lake of its own as a snail proceeds in its shell, by devouring the earth before and spewing it out behind. In the course of digestion, incidentally, by means of a cyanide-plated stomach, it neatly segregated every particle of gold its gravelly meal might contain.

Presently his eyes lifted from the blue papers; he settled his chin in his hand and watched the afternoon shadows on his wall, frowning. What was it, this baffling sense of slight unreality, of proportions a little out of drawing that he felt in this new environment?

He thought of the people he had seen for the past two weeks. Sir Edward—of course, his occasional queer absentness, the melancholy that hung round him, explained itself easily enough when Dan heard (a credited newcomer hears everything) his story—the loss of his young wife and baby in a remote hill station. No wonder he adored his remaining daughter Vivian. And there again, something a little strange—from rather cool civility she had altered overnight to warm friendliness, an unmistakable interest.

And Samford, courteous—acting more the host than the employer—actually, it seemed, concerned about his enjoying himself. Dan never felt he made a direct contact with the man. He slid away, somehow, just out of reach. Of course he was tremendously busy.

As he focused his thoughts thus upon one person or another in turn, they seemed normal enough. It was only when looked at obliquely, when felt rather than scrutinized, that they, that the whole scene, took on this quality of strangeness. Perhaps, he decided, it was just that he was unaccustomed to idleness.

For he had had nothing to do. With usual energy, he did it strenuously, exploring the ever-fascinating novelties of the city, walking miles up and down the native quarter, going again and again to the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, which he now knew in every phase from glittering noon to enchanted twilight. For this the men with whom he played tennis and golf ragged him genially, so that he had never mentioned the adventure of his first night there. Nor had he ever seen the girl again. Despite the vague shadowed glimpses the swift-falling night had given, he felt he would have recognized her.

He stretched his arms, yawned. The heat of afternoon lay strongly over the room; from the open door behind him to the garden came the spicy odor of pimento trees.

Vivian Mount, in vivid white, crossed the garden. She glanced up, saw him, stopped, and approached the window silently, looking in and smiling. Her greeting was already on her lips when he rose suddenly, folded up his blue-prints and slid them behind the books on his shelves. With a sudden sense of intrusion she drew back a moment, then called.

He came eagerly, his face lighting.

"Vivian! What luck—I'm so glad to see you—come in!"

But she stood in the window, laughing. "Isn't this forward of me? I was cutting through the garden and saw your back. You've a nice back, Dan."

"Come on in. I'll get tea or something." He was sliding into his coat.

"No, I'd love to, but it would be all over Rangoon by evening that I was a bad girl. Come out on the veranda and give me tea. I can't stop long."

Over the second cup she paused in mid-sentence and leaned toward him. "What is it, Dan? You have not paid the slightest attention to what I've been saying, really. What's on your mind?"

He extinguished a cigarette absently in his tea-cup, brows drawn down, then looked at her suddenly.

"Vivian, I'm puzzled."

She arched eyebrows of interrogation.

"Of course, maybe I'm not experienced enough with—well, with the English and the East, but—I don't get it! I've been here a month, and I haven't done a damned thing."

"Oh." She smiled. "That's rather hard on us, isn't it? People don't usually get bored under six weeks."

"Don't be nasty. I've had a great time—thanks largely to you and your father—and Samford," he added as an afterthought. "But that's just it. One long house-party. That's not what I came for."

"Frivolity becomes you, though." She was watching him carefully behind her cigarette. "There's something fascinating about these strong men of action caught in the silken snares of our useless lives."

"Don't kid me," he pleaded, so earnestly that she shifted ground.

"I'm sorry, Dan. Really. I know you're worried. Tell me."

He began slowly. "I feel so—no good. I've tried ever since I got here to get up the river and look over the mine-site; tried to hurry along the barges to get my machinery up. Nothing happens. I go to Samford about it till he's getting to hate the sight of me. It's been fixed up three times and fallen through somehow. And if I don't get the dredge installed before the river starts to go down, I'll never fulfill the time-clause in my contract. This is my biggest job—to date. I've *got* to put it over. And I feel all—smothered—" he brushed bronzed fingers across his face impatiently, "shelved. Why it's as if—"

And here he checked abruptly, aware he was on the point of voicing some kind of usation, he hardly knew what. He ded quickly:

"—as if time meant nothing out here."

Vivian instantly felt the withdrawal. She e, and picked up her parasol.

"It's your Yankee mania for speed, Dan. u can't hurry the East. It doesn't work. ust Allan. He knows what he's about. d don't mind his reticence."

He looked at her searchingly. "Thanks, iv. You're a comfort. I'll walk along to e office with you. Left my pet pipe there is morning."

In front of the Bank of Burma she held t her hand. "If you've nothing better to o," she murmured, "you might come along d see me tonight."

"Love to." He grinned with pleasure, d watched her up the street, her slender, tive, curved young body, aware, again, of shadowy familiarity in her—a memory at just escaped conscious grasp.

HE TURNED hastily into the offices of the mining company, almost knocking down a slim Burmese lad with a oom in his hand, leaning within the door. he office was a big low room, studded with sks and electric fans; at the back, private uarters for Samford, lightly partitioned off ith beaver board.

The place, as usual, at this time of day, as deserted. He had crossed the empty oom, almost soundlessly in his light shoes, hen his own name, beyond the partition, topped him. He recognized Samford's oice.

". . . damned dredge came out too soon. hey must have rushed the order. And oung Starrett's getting troublesome. He's ound he'll go up-country and look over the ine-site. We can't have that."

"You can't exactly forbid him." It was a oice Dan didn't know.

"I—don't—think—I'll—have to." Dan's hole body stiffened. There was a short ilence, the scrape of a lighted match.

"You don't think he's wise to—"

Samford's voice broke in like a flash. "Sht! No—how could he be? But he's een to look over the ground. He shan't, hough. The damned dredge'll rot in the arehouse first. Another couple of weeks—en days—will do it. The Chang'll be too w for anything to get up this year . . . Now, about that bank of Madras—"

Dan waited for no more. On legs that tingled he raced noiselessly out. A multitude of small doubts had swung to the magnet of those overheard phrases, and pointed unmistakably in one direction. Whatever lay behind Samford's scheming one thing was clear—he was not to be allowed near the mine. The river would sink; his first big job, upon some pretext or other, would fall through; and he would slink home discredited.

Not if he knew it, he thought, as he increased his pace. Here was action at last. He had emerged from a mist of uncertainties and bewilderment into an air keen with an unmistakable zest, that of danger.

He reached the hotel at nearly six; hurled clothes from his trunk, flung out tramping kit and stored knapsack with emergency equipment, chocolate and biscuits, his tiny silk tent, and medicine case; ate an early and hasty dinner, and set off in the brief twilight.

He blessed his days of idleness, the curiosity that had taken him hours on end through the native quarter, for he knew where to seek for what he wanted.

The night had wholly fallen as he reached the native river-front, where the little blue moon-shaped boats and the long swift canoes cluster round the rotting wharves and the dark rivermen in loincloth and turban gamble and smoke and drowse.

They stared at the tall stranger in the flickering lights along the wharf-heads and gestured vaguely, with soft halting English. A motor-boat? What that, *sahib?* They shook their heads till he made an unmistakable "put-put-putting" sound, whereon they all laughed loudly and talked among themselves. Who were they to own a craft with a devil on its bow that must be fed on fire-water, and that coughed and breathed flame when angry? *Sahib* Ruston, now, at the I. F. C.'s dock, owned one to hire.

If there was one thing he did *not* want on this expedition it was another *sahib,* Dan reflected. He pulled his copper hair, looking frowningly at the pattern of water moving through the faint tangle of light from the wharf-head. The rivermen whispered.

Then a tall chap, like a shiny bronze gladiator, approached. Perhaps the *sahib* would take a native canoe? Sixteen men, oh, very strong *sahib.* How long to Kim-Popal on the Chang? Two days, stopping overnight on the way.

Dan computed. About twenty hours of straight going.

"Too slow." He thrust a hand in his pocket and the big riverman's eyes glinted. "For a canoe with sixteen men to go day and night, I will give twenty rupees. We stay there a day, maybe two, then come back. What do you say?"

They talked. Dan cut the swelling prelude of an Oriental bargain by turning away. The man pattered after.

"*Sahib*, we agree."

"All right. Tomorrow morning, before dawn. I'll come here."

Hardly had his retreating back vanished up the wharf when a shadow detached itself from the night and sidled to the riverman—an oily, tattooed Chin.

"What said he?"

"Ai! what concern of thine to meddle with *sahibs?*"

The Chin quietly produced a rupee. "For the truth," he said. "I too work for *sahibs*."

"O-ho! well then," the man turned the coin suspiciously in his big paw, bit it, nodded, and spoke. The man slid away. And by the time that Dan was puzzling an amused Vivian by his unaccountable return of bubbling good spirits, Samford had listened to a whisper outside his window and was hastening through the maze of the Burmese section that spreads beyond the old west gate of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda, to a house set in palm trees that stood on the main thoroughfare to the native river-front.

CHAPTER IV

"AND this thing," Samford was saying in Burmese, "must not happen. It troubles me, because I mustn't seem to interfere."

He sat on a couch in a low room lit with candles. It was a curious, bastard room; mirrors framed in lace-carved Burmese wood with prints from *London Life* and *Punch* tacked up between them. In one corner a thread of incense spiraled up before a small shrine to the Bodhisat, opposite a huge and hideous golden oak victrola. On a long table, a pile of picture-sections such as one who could not read might keep from English-printed papers; beside it, a shimmer of exquisite reds and oranges where a scarf had been carelessly dropped.

Despite its hybrid quality, the room had charm; perhaps because of the woman w sat near Samford in a rattan peacock ch such as one buys on the wharves of K loon, her small round head centering t great circle of the chair's back. She wore yellow evening gown of the mode of 192 and Burmese slippers, and smoked a chero the size and shape of a giant fire-crack The black hair was piled and smoothed, wi pins of filagree and jade, above brows lev as a Greek's. Her eyes watched him, velvety a black they seemed expressionle as she slowly exhaled smoke.

Reflectively she spoke. "My husba wishes this man be kept from going?"

"From going perhaps; surely from read ing the mine-site behind thy village."

"Wherefore?"

He shook his head a little impatientl "It would work ruin on the things I pla and on me. He knows too much. Mo than that thou would not understand."

She sat so still; only the hand with t cheroot, and the slow-expanding cloud pale yellow smoke seemed to move in th room. The candles burned straight an long. Samford, hiding his nervousness u der swift smoking, deliberately relaxed o the couch. She said presently, "The rive paddlers are liars. They talk but will no do. But there are others here of m people." She resumed her slow smoking presently added, softly, "And those of m village might—"

Samford held up a hasty hand. "Nay— make thy plans. I know nothing of them." His heavy lids lifted in one of his swif shooting glances, as he stood up. She di not move. He went to her, knelt beside th chair.

"This thing—thou do it for me—tonight The time is short."

Her hands touched his shoulders, the caressed his throat and neck; her sooty black eyes glowed softly.

"What would I not do for thee," sh whispered. "Thou knowest. Thou art th sun upon my fields, the strong tree abov my house."

Samford tightened his arms round her. Suddenly she freed herself, crossed the room left him staring, startled an instant out o his poise.

"What now?" he asked quickly.

She stood silent, wringing her hands lik a creature under a spell—half-turned, the threw herself into his arms.

"I would be known as thine—known in the bazaars, in the pagoda. Here am I, Chang-Kopa, thy wife, truly thy *wife*, kept hiding like a mistress, and thou, the great Rajah-Sahib, comest like a fearsome lover to a forbidden house." The voice rose swiftly. "I would have all know that I am thine; I, no other."

Samford's eyes kindled, and he stooped over her, stirred and touched.

"This is a tale already told," he said quietly, "Must I tell it again? This must be, for a time. It is necessary to what I do. Only a little while, and the governor shall salute you as my wife. Only a little time." She slipped into his arms, hiding her face.

As he left, he looked at his watch. Ten thirty. She nodded, lifting to him a look of yearning, of blind adoration.

"The time is short," she said. "But—go now, my husband. I must do much before dawn. And I think," she smiled slowly, "that the man will not overly disturb thee."

Samford walked home slowly, thinking of the woman he had left. Little pictures floated and vanished before his mind. His free roving life from one end of Burma to the other, taking, as was his code, where his fancy pleased him.

The Shan girl, met one misty sunrise morning at a spring near a village of the Yoma mountains; the woman of Pagan who had worn orange jasmine in her hair; others . . . then this woman of the level brows, Chang-Kopa, encountered a year before at the village of Kim-Popal, in whose rest-house he had stayed while exploring the mine-site. And here fate, in the form of a silent father, headman of the village, had overtaken him one night and presented him a choice at the point of a two foot razor-like *dah* with the result that there had been a secret, but very real, marriage, and he had, perforce, brought her to Rangoon and hidden her away here.

He ran a hand through his hair. Well, it would not be long now. Starrett, the young colt, had jumped straight into his hands; was going up-river on his own responsibility. If he did not come back. . . .

There remained Vivian, dark, lovely—Vivian who loved him, and who eluded him, as no one who loved him had ever done before . . . he hastened his step through the dimly lighted streets.

IN THE clear blue coolness that precedes the tropic dawn, Dan stepped softly through the windows of his room and strode out of the garden, one hand patting the Colt automatic that nuzzled his hip, the other adjusting the straps of his pack-sack.

There was light enough to outline the little Sule Pagoda, as he passed it, to block in rooflines against the close, thick stars. It was the rarest of all hours of the tropic calendar—when to the warm perfumed langor of the night has been added a spice, a keen pungency, of brief coolness.

He turned off Dalhousie Street, struck through the narrow alleys of the native quarter, his shoes soundless in the dust, and came out into the thoroughfare leading to the river-front and the tumble-down Burmese wharves.

As he passed a black cañon of a street, premonition leaped at him—danger. Action followed on its heels—a hurling impact out of the dark, whirling arms, and legs, his hand tugging for the revolver.

It was silent, and quickly over. After the first rush, they fought timidly. Two of them, little lithe men; he heard a ripping tear; whirled, grappled a wrist, yanked up and back. The clatter of steel on stone. A grinding smash of his boot on a bare ankle, a short jab at a face too close to swing on, and suddenly, momentarily he was free, running like a buck for the open river-front. Thoughts tagged and flickered across his mind, and he was roaringly devastatingly angry.

"Chance hold-up? Maybe, but I don't believe it. Too well planned. Just luck I didn't get it for good, that time. But *why*—somebody must have known."

A sudden vision of the multiplicity of things that might happen to him on this expedition if it were known, expanded before him—a sweep of unknown and inimical country, organized and powerful and secret opposition—

"But I've got to," he thought grimly. He stopped running; listened, turning in the faint light. Only the distant crowing of a cock, the far yap of a pariah dog dropped like specks into the flawless silence. He had reached the river-front, and approached the wharf, gun levelled. When the riverman materialized out of the darkness, Dan halted him in a tone that brought the big fellow fawning and voluble.

"*Sahib*, thee canoe here. We already." He led the way down the wharf. Dan covering his back and keeping alert eyes right and left. The man continued to talk, as Orientals will when frightened a little. "Good canoe, *sahib*, plenty good. Strong fellahs, you bet, plenty strong." He halted and Dan peered over the edge of the wharf to a long slim dim shape punctuated regularly with round knobs, the heads of the paddlers. And again a vista opened before him and he stood on the wharf's edge and looked at the oily, black water, the dim craft; looked on to the unknown country, the infinite chances. He held a quick little colloquy.

"If I stop now, I'll never get up there. Neither will the dredge. They'll wangle it till it's too late; and make it out we've broken the time-clause—that lets 'em out of the contract, and their last two payments—some reason, they don't want our dredge, now it's here—that means the job's foozled."

A picture of his boss' face rose as Dan had last seen it; iron-grey, rampant hair, falcon nose, the boring challenge of kind keen eyes.

He turned abruptly to the riverman and counted out money. "This is half. Other half when I come back. And—" he laid the cold muzzle of his Colt against the man's flinching naked chest—"if anybody tries anything funny, anybody, *you'll* get it when I come back. See?"

"But *sahib*," the man stammered, thoroughly frightened, "we good fellahs No bad boys, no. I tell them take you veree quick." He spoke to the steersman in Burmese. "I think this *sahib* is a little mad. He has a fire-gun. Something has frightened him."

"Yah!" The steersman, a slim keen youth with powerful shoulders, spat into the water. "I go with no mad *sahib* having a fire-gun. They kill like buffaloes when angry."

"Peace, fool. Is thy father a rich merchant? The *sahib* pays. And he is not wholly mad. They are all children. Mind the canoe. He comes."

Dan stepped down amidships, found a seat on some folded cloths, settled himself The steersman spoke softly.

"Is the *sahib* ready?"

"Ready." The paddles lifted, plunged, the canoe leaped like a mustang. Dan turned. The wharf had dropped out of sight. A vast blue-black bowl curved over him, prickled at one edge with the distant sparse lights of quays and godowns.

He slid the knapsack round into his lap, opened it, and swore. The knife aimed for his neck had ripped one end; his flask and medicine kit were gone; fallen out in the run for the river.

All day they paddled, as the sun rose in a spurt of flame, bore down in sizzling vertical beams, and set again beyond the low foothills that precede the Arracan Yomas. The men paddled in shifts, with apparent tirelessness. They made one stop at noon; before a fishing village whose bamboo houses waded out into the stream on stilts, and children and women peered fearfully from door and window. The fishermen shiny and smelling abominably, brought rice and dried fish, for which Dan paid, and exchanged pleasantries with the crew. They met a few native craft like their own, nothing else.

For the young steersman wise in the ways of the river, had left Rangoon Creek before sun-up, and taken a short-cut through the maze of small streams and channels which cut the great delta plain of the Irawaddy, and which at this season form an intricate watery tangle across it.

They emerged upon the Irawaddy at sunset, vast and smooth and mingled a soot brown and metallic orange, sweeping before them in a huge curve. With the darkness Dan felt drowsiness creeping over him; his eyes rolled up; his head jerked. Finally he curled himself in the bottom of the canoe and fell into a doze, awakening from time to time. Once the paddlers were changing their shifts, with low murmured words, and once, raising his head above the gunwale he saw, far out in the center of the river, the glitter of the I. F. C. night-boat from Mandalay. Then he fell into a deep sleep to awaken, cramped and cold, at dawn. The sky was pale; the great river had vanished; he made out through the low river-mist, forested banks not one hundred yards from each other.

"*Sahib*," called the steersman softly, "we come to place. Village of Kim-Popal This is Chang River, *sahib*."

Dan munched chocolate and dampened biscuit, and peered ahead. Among the spirals of the thinning mist he made out the more enduring tendrils of woodsmoke; a smooth stretch of shore line suggested a landing beach. And as they drew nearer, a gong sounded across the morning stillness, and a pagoda lifted its head among the trees.

THE village received them silently; a group of people lining up outside the vine-grown stockade. Dan, stretching cramped limbs, used his steersman as interpreter. Oh, yes, there was a place, back in the jungle where white men had come; yes, to dig in the ground. They pointed to the broad and well-worn trail leading into the woods. One had only to follow that road.

A sullen lot, thought Dan, studying their dark faces; quite unlike the pleasant merry Burman he had seen in Rangoon. He thought a moment, then spoke to his steersman.

"Tell them I'll take one of their men as a guide to the place," he said. "You will go with me, and two of the crew. The others can stay here. Get breakfast, and bring me some, here."

The sight of money lifted somewhat the apathy of the villagers; they disappeared inside the gates with the crew, and presently the steersman returned to Dan with a leaf full of steaming curry and rice. As he ate, his mind busied itself with transportation; Samford had told him the mine-site lay five miles inland through the forest. Barges to the river's edge—they could come alongside, judging from the pitch of the bank. That would obviate lightering. The trail through the forest seemed broad and clear. Probably it would be a matter of native carts and mules, like that place in Bolivia, if the ground was solid enough. Mules and carts—he began a rough calculation of weight, trips, cartage.

But his mind would not focus. Behind the march of figures, the mental procession of sweating natives and bawling drivers he had already sent crawling into the jungle, leaped his curiosity. What was it all about? Why had Samford so steadily eluded his request as to force him into this flight, and what had meant that nightmare, that sudden attack on the way to the wharves?

Dan stuffed his knapsack with the remainder of his breakfast, lighted a pipe. It was a silent departure. The guide seemed willing enough, promised pay. The others looked on. The crew already stretched out in the shade on indolent elbows. The track through the forest was hard and smooth. Dan asked questions of the guide, which were returned through the steersman. No *sahibs* had been in for nearly four moons. Before that they came, bearing iron, and built an iron house and a small house.

"Warehouse" thought Dan. "God, what a job."

The drive of his imagination carried him along so that he trod the heels of the villager. The air grew warm, hot; the sunlight bored through the heavy ceiling of leaves, no longer in slanted rays, but in vertical, sizzling bars; gnats danced round his face and the sweat crept out among the roots of his crisp copper hair.

". . . and the way is kept open, *sahib*," said the steersman, translating, "because people of another village, in the woods beyond where we go, come out this way to the river. Perhaps we get tiffin at that village, *sahib*. They Burmese. This *bhaktri* (the term is quite untranslatable, it means a specifically diseased pig) is a Chin." He indicated the back of the villager.

The way wound slightly, and began to mount a little, following a small stream that crept darkly under water plants with tremendous orange-veined leaves. Then, ahead, the green gloom broke suddenly into a clash of sunlight, a clearing. He had reached the spot. He judged the distance from the river to be three miles.

It was a clearing seventy-five yards square, the ground level, the forest round it. Opposite where he stood, staring eagerly, the trail disappeared again into the woods beyond. At his right, a small house, roughly built of planks and bamboo, while across the clearing, incredibly ugly and anomalous, squatted a square building of corrugated iron. All these Dan took in with the tail of his eye—his direct gaze had leaped, at once, to to a series of pits in the middle of the clearing, varying from two to six feet in depth. Over the place hung a sense of silence and abandonment; weeds sprouted among the gravel of the pits; the corrugated iron was rusted.

With a growing bewilderment he stepped out into the sunshine, setting his hat on his head, and made for the pits, the steersman following. The others squatted in the shade.

He stooped above the exposed earth, and rose with a handful, running the coarse, gravelly substance through his fingers from palm to palm, his thick eyebrows arching incredulously.

"Not that I know so *damn* much about gravels," he muttered to himself, "but—"

He looked round the country again. The forest, which had been thinning steadily as the trail rose, stretched away before him, isolated great trees, and sufficient space to nourish small bushes beyond the clearing. To his right, the little river disappeared, the trail following it. He looked down again at the dirt in his hand, frowning . . . a funny layout. Of course it was, as far as his knowledge went, geologically possible.

He stood for a long moment, thinking, while the men watched him, and whispered among themselves. Then he suddenly became very busy. He crossed the clearing to the warehouse, open and largely empty, discovered what he sought—a cluster of shovels, thrown together in a dusky corner. He handed one to the paddler, pointing to the pit.

"Dig," he said briefly, and made his way to the stream. Here he unlimbered his knapsack, and drew out the folding army frying pan and cover, and the battered coffee-pot. This he knew held about a quart.

Under his direction the men brought sample shovels of dirt from different depths and various pits, and watched with round eyes as he measured the dirt into the pan, and then rocked it gently to and fro in the running water.

So intent were they that no one noticed when the villager who had brought them slipped like a shadow into the woods beyond the warehouse.

THE sun was near the western trees when Dan stopped figuring on the back of an old envelope, and stood up, excitement flaming through him. He had checked his results; his apparatus was rough, but he had allowed for that. And, giving every possible margin, the highest assay yielded was barely *one cent per cubic yard.*

Shaking with excitement, he strode to the center of the clearing and stood looking down upon one of the shallow pots. The steersman following. He knew the operating cost of the Stuba No. 14; knew that it only began to clear a profit at eight cents per cubic yard—suddenly, wholly, Samford's reason to prevent his visiting the mine-site burst through the resistances his mind had been offering to the conclusion, sweeping away his intense desire not to believe, illuminating every puzzling detail of the baffled, futile time since his arrival.

"My God," he whispered, "faked—the whole —— damned scheme—faked—"

He got no further. Swiftly it happened, so swiftly that impressions registered simultaneously. A shout of warning from the men at the clearing's edge; a whistling spitting sound. The young steersman behind him uttered a gurgling cry; Dan spun to see his head tilted back, his hands tearing at his throat, where the feathered end of a shaft protruded. Blood spurted down his bare chest.

As the man's knees sagged under him, came another whistling flicker. Dan felt a hot pain in his shoulder, whirled, and dropped into the shallow pit, blazing into the woods with his automatic.

An arrow cut the grass above him; he heard the sizz of others over his head; caught a tail-eye glimpse of the canoe-men leaping for the cover of the woods, howling. The arrows ceased. He lay flat in the shallow pit, and waited.

Nothing happened. Stillness dropped down over the inclosure. He heard the gasping breaths of the steersman behind him, the dry sounds of his convulsive writhings in the grass. These grew fainter and finally ceased.

He lay motionless a long time. He became aware, as his tension slackened, a little of a throbbing pain in his left shoulder; felt it, winced, and drew away his hand sticky with blood. The arrow had gone clean through his thin coat and the thick deltoid muscle. Cautiously he raised his hat above the level of the depression where he lay. Then lifted himself, ready to drop with the first sound. None came. He cautiously squirmed round to look behind him, keeping well in the pit. Thus he saw the steersman; he lay, face up to the sky, the arrow shaft with its gay feathers protruding from his throat, his eyes staring. He was quite dead, the blood oozing from his neck where the arrow had pierced the jugular. Flies hovered above his face, and one, as he looked, walked over a glazing eye-ball.

With a shudder Dan drew himself away. Still nothing moved. There was no sign of the canoe-men. They were doubtless half way to the river by now. Nor was there a move from the silent woods. Perhaps they were waiting. He tried to reason the thing out. He had heard of "dacoits," the bands of robbers that formerly roamed woods and lonely trails. They would have followed up that first volley. There was no reason for them to wait in hiding—as they might even now be doing, among the trees. A hundred men, despite the openness of the sun-flecked woods, might conceal themselves behind the big trees. He suddenly felt as if a long time had passed. He listened intently and heard only the finely wrought mesh of tiny sounds that weave the forest's afternoon silence.

Then he caught something else—a dull, regular beat—soft, heavy pulsing in the air, like the distant vibrations of a heavy gun. It drove through the fine wood noises, soft and huge as the crests of waves lift through floating chips. He listened to this for a long time. The hurt in his shoulder grew, and spread, he felt long legs of pain crawling down his arm, and up across his neck. He ought to bathe the wound in the stream. The cool water, the feeling of it flowing over his head. He must.

He began to crawl, keeping as much as possible behind grass and occasional bushes. His body stretched behind him, heavily, moving thickly. Sharp twigs scratched his hands, and sent tingling little shocks through him. That heavy soft pulsing in the air became a little swifter, but nothing else happened, so he rose to his feet, and crouching, watching, made for the stream. The ground was curiously uneven, he tripped and staggered. But there was the cool water, before him. He knelt, plunged his arms in, scooping it upon his left shoulder . . . it seemed not to reach that steadily burning, humming pain, his coat—

He tore it off, ripped away his shirt, and, lying along the stream, thrust the wounded shoulder in—the pain leaped in little dancing chains from the wound, coursing down his arm, and up his neck to the base of his brain. It was hard for him to see the wound; too close, but he twisted his head, and glimpsed, with difficulty, a rough deep red furrow. The sight relieved him. A flesh wound, nasty, but not fatal. He bound it up with his handkerchief. The enemy—he had forgotten them. He looked round quickly. The forest was empty. The pulsing sound, however, was still there; a little stronger; he could not tell whence it came. And his thoughts, they seemed to be coming in pulses too, with little rushes that landed them before him after a long pause. He saw one coming now, watched it coasting down to him, on something bright and glittering, like a metal sled . . . it arrived with a rush. "A cent per cubic yard—no profit—" it was gone. But the metal thing remained, and he recognized it was his mess pan, caught by a slanted ray of sunlight, lying where he had left it; he saw the gravel, and the water.

It brought him to his feet. The other pits, he must be sure, couldn't tell from just one—not fair—must play fair. A cent per cubic yard, a cent per cubic yard. How that would make Vivian laugh. A cubic yard—there it was, like a child's huge toy block, rough-cast, like cement, and in the very middle, shining impudently, one gleaming copper cent.

He rocked across the clearing, the last sunlight coming in waves that matched the pulsing sound—loud, hot waves—another pit—the gravel rose swiftly as he bent over, struck his face—coming in waves too, falling through his fingers a cent at a time.

Then as he staggered back, his hands full of it, toward the brook, everything swept away an instant like fog swept aside by wind, and in that interval, that blankness, realization slipped in and he pressed his bursting head with his hands.

"God—what is it? I'm sick—I'm damned sick." He heard his heart pounding, pounding, and suddenly knew it for the pulsing sound that had puzzled him. Then a flash of pain shot from his shoulder, and with it came the blinding certainty—the arrow had been *poisoned*.

But even as the terror of this knowledge struck him, and he looked round, helplessly, the interval closed again. What was it? A cent a cubic yard. With cupped and empty hands he staggered toward the brook, writhing at him through pulsing waves of green. He stood a moment, swaying, clutched convulsively at the gold sunlight dying across the clearing, spun once, and fell crashing beside the stream.

CHAPTER V

SAMFORD, to do him justice, passed an uncomfortable day and a sleepless night. Next day he waited, half-fearfully, for some report or other—he hardly knew what. He carefully kept clear of the native quarter. He dared not ask his wife what had happened. He did a good deal of swift thinking, so when Sir Edward asked him, the third day after Dan's disappearance, where he was, Samford replied with a smile.

"Really, I'm a little in the dark myself. The young man has taken French leave. But I've an idea he's slipped off up-river to look over the mine-site, you know. Been a bit restless, I fancy he's not used to waiting in order to get things done. Matter of fact, he spoke of doing this very thing." He managed it admirably; Sir Edward left with the slight indignant feeling that Samford was being exceptionally nice with a hot-headed young subordinate who had rather embarrassingly taken considerable upon himself.

If Dan disappeared . . . he shrugged. If his wife's plans failed, however, and he returned with adverse reports, Samford meant to calmly face him down. After all, his own position was almost impregnable; a young inexperienced American would hardly be listened to as against himself. However, it might bring matters to a head; he might have to send the barge up-river. And as soon as it began operations, and its operations were officially reported. . . .

Late that afternoon he entered the empty office of the Burmese Mining Co., Ltd., and systematically ransacked Dan's desk. Correspondence, a pipe, a letter from his company mentioning another job in Peru in four months, but nothing else. The plans for the assembling of the dredge were not there. His eye on the door, he hastily restored the articles and went out, disappointed, but unbeaten. He'd try the room next.

He quite failed to notice a slim young Burmese, employed as a sweeper, who squatted outside the door on his haunches, drowsing. This alone indicated his profound disquiet; Samford had been long enough in the East to notice, in a normal state of mind, things like that. Sweepers finish their jobs by noon.

Vivian met him at her door with an anxious smile; lit his cigarette, and watched him sink into a long chair.

"So the bird has flown," she observed. "Apparently as a fascinating vampire I'm about as effective as a nun." She studied him with her cool dark enigmatic eyes. "I might have known something was afoot. He was so gay the night before he left. He even made love to me. Rather badly."

Samford rose restlessly. "Don't joke. He may find out altogether too much. If I could find his blue-prints—"

"His what?"

"His plans for assembling the dredge."

Plans for the dredge. Into her mind flashed the memory of Dan working in his hotel room, his big coatless figure moving across the floor, the plans in his hand, slipping them behind the books. It was *Murray's Guide to India*, she remembered, next to the Kipling.

She looked at him seriously enough now; went to him quickly.

"What is it, Allan? There's something troubling you—badly—it's more than you make out. Can't you tell me about it? Why do you want these plans so? I—"

It was on her tongue to tell him where they were; his expression stopped her. He had an insane, momentary desire to shout it at her; that the whole scheme from beginning to end was false; that there was no gold in the mine; that her father's money, and that of every other investor, lay snugly where he hoped before long to mobilize it and vanish forever out of the picture.

He drew a hand across his forehead. "You wouldn't understand it," he snapped. "I've told you all I can. Things have gone a little wrong; I've got to get those plans. I don't want operations begun yet. That's all. For God's sake don't pester me." He walked away.

"Allan!" Her voice jerked him round; she stood tense in rare anger, her eyes sparkling. "This is going to stop, right now. No, *don't* interrupt me. I don't mind you not telling me about your plans, if you don't want to. Understand that. But this—this treating me as a—a child is going to stop."

His hands were out toward her in apology. She backed away. "No—don't touch me. You must listen. This has been storing up for a long time. You've repeatedly put off announcing our engagement—said you wanted to save that for the celebration of opening the mine. You hinted at father's money being tied up with you—as if I'd best do as you say. And even if I—" her voice trembled a moment, then steadied again "—if I do happen to to care for you, I shan't be treated casually—like anybody."

Quite suddenly she was crying bitterly, and Samford's arms were round her. A long interval. Then, with a little hysterical gulp, she drew away, wiping her eyes. The anger had gone, but a quiet determination had settled round her mouth. She looked at him speculatively.

"Allan," she said, "what would you give for those plans?"

His complete astonishment put him a moment off guard. "Anything," he returned quickly. "Anything."

She was rapidly regaining her composure; even something of her usual cool poise. She crossed the room and sat down facing him.

"Very well. Now listen. I am about to make a most unmaidenly proposal. The day—" she paused an instant, to give her words weight— "the day you publicly announce our engagement, I shall give you, as an engagement present, those plans."

And when he left an hour later, that was all he knew. Neither threatening, nor pleading, nor all the devices of a lover could shake her. Naturally, he had agreed.

Next evening her resolution had waned; she had found it was one thing to make a dramatic promise, another to achieve it. She had gone to the hotel; made an excuse of having lent a book to Mr. Starrett. The clerk, a zealous half-caste, accompanied her to his room and made search with such misguided vigor that she had no opportunity to more than slip her hand behind the books. She felt the stiff folded papers. They were still there.

She left, chagrined and nervous. She had missed the opportunity; another would be more difficult. She could not repeat the excursion without attracting at least comment from the clerks. It would be reported to Dan on his return.

Nor did Samford dare, for the same reason, to follow his impulse and go straight from his interview with Vivian to Dan's room. He was nicely spitted upon a dilemma of great subtlety, where he writhed impotently. The urgent need of swift action did not tend to calm him. Starrett would surely return next day—unless he was not to return at all.

Upon that he centered his hope, meantime casting about him for a means of searching Dan's room without showing himself.

THERE came out of the forest beyond the clearing, small brown men carrying bows, with quivers across their naked backs. A slim man led them and danced for nervousness.

One of the others nudged him.

"Well, it is done, chicken-heart. But for thee it had been finished when he first cleared the wood. Thee and thy devils that protect a *sahib* while the sun is high. Yah!" He spat contemptuously, a slit-eyed, brutal-faced Arakanese, a stocky bull of a man who had brought the order from Rangoon.

They slid through the slanting sunlight to where Dan lay beside his pan, and gathered round him.

"What think you?" said the slim man. "Shall we carry him into the woods and there let him be? For surely he will die now."

"Nay," the Arakanese rubbed a thumb across his broad nose, "the message was very clear. 'Let him perish before night' it said. I am not one to disobey a voice of power." He lifted his bow, and aimed at the unconscious man's exposed throat.

But the slim man snatched his arm angrily. "Art thou utterly a fool?" he hissed. "Is it not enough that we have brought death upon a *sahib*, that we must also leave our mark for all to read?"

The other shrugged. "Of course," he said gently, "if thy father feared a shadow, and thy mother bore before her time—" he spun out the insult with dispatch.

"All very well for thee," returned the slim man stubbornly, "who live afar, and will presently go thy way. What of us? This is our country, we of the village of Kim-Popal. What will happen, if the blood of a *sahib* be on our heads?"

"Listen, all." A third man with a high forehead and narrow eyes spoke. "Let him lie. The sun is half a palm-tree from setting. He will not live the night, thou knowest it. And," his face puckered with cunning, "in this place he is much nearer to the village of Dhang, whom we hate. If any blame fall, it will fall upon them."

"Now, that is the voice of wisdom," the slim man answered quickly. "Let us leave him; be sure the men of the river who brought him have fled; they saw nothing. Only this one," he pointed to the dead steersman. "Him we will conceal."

Reluctantly the other agreed. "After all, it is naught to me. And night is near. Let us go and dispose of the dead one before dark. It is not well to handle the newly dead at night; their souls may lay hold on one and strike him palsied." They were all a little frightened, the Arakanese no less.

The slim man bent over the unconscious figure, and shivered. "I like not this meddling with *sahibs*," he muttered. "But when he is found who will know? And he may not be found. Few pass this way save the people of Dhang."

"At least, carry him further aside."

They stopped to pick him up; overhead a kite, circling the blue, whistled eerily. The Arakanese drew back hastily, muttering a charm.

"Touch him not! Didst not hear? It is the voice of *Baltshi;* who guards the dying. Let lie; see, it is in a hollow, apart from the cleared space. Away!"

"Now who fears devils?" jeered the slim man, but his teeth chattered.

Snapping fingers to avert demons, they hastened to the pit where lay the stiffening steersman, plucked him up and and melted into the woods as only forest people can.

CHAPTER VI

ONE of Yunthu's cows, together with her calf, had strayed out into the forest and disappeared; the old gate-keeper had searched slowly and painfully all day and toward evening some of the others of the village of Dhang took pity on him.

"He is very old," they said. "We shall help. Let us go toward that place where the *thakins* came and built the iron house. She may have gone that far."

So it happened that, in the twilight, a small boy, ranging through the woods beside the clearing, stepped across the stream and almost upon Dan as he lay. The lad's shrieks of fright brought the others running. There rose a great babble.

"It is a *sahib*—sore hurt—see the wound is in his shoulder."

"He is dead."

"Nay, he lives," one had bent and timidly laid his hand on the broad white chest, "but it is almost finished. Wah—here is an evil business."

"Let us take him quickly to the priest. Perhaps he will cure him with a charm—"

"Nay—why meddle, and receive the wrath of the *hpan-doti* (district police). What if he die among us—as he surely will—"

"Thou knowest how Keshoo hates the *Englishi*. He will not bless us for bringing this upon the village."

Thus they wrangled, as the dusk sifted down among the trees. "For," argued the first speaker, "all *sahibs* are rich, and if he recovers he will pay us. If not, we can hide him, and who will know?"

"And he is alone," said a youngster gently, gathering up Dan's kit and coat. He was a *punjee*, that is, he was serving his apprenticeship as a Buddhist priest, as all Burmese do for a time at least. "Is it meet to let our brother die alone?"

"Nay, I did but think of Keshoo our headman," returned the other, abashed. "Come, Kahng-tse, thou and I are the strongest among us."

So they carried him back through the forest, as the evening settled blue through the trees, and brought him to Keshoo, where he sat, gaunt and silver-haired, before the fire in front of his house. The old man looked coldly at the swollen unconscious face.

"Have the *sahibs* so enriched us that we may nurse them?" He bent keen old eyes over the wound.

"This is a scratch. It would not bleed a bird to death. The man is young and strong." He peered closer. "Ao! This is *mallagh* (poison). If he die, and be found, they will come down on us with trials and watchings from now till the new rains." He stared, frowning, pulling undecided at his silver beard.

As they waited his word, Shahli-Mar, white cheroot in hand, came out of the house behind and stood upon its platform. She had newly awakened, and looked with sleepy eyes at the crowd round the fire. The recumbent figure she could not see.

"What is this?" She pushed her way through the crowd.

"A *sahib*, poisoned and like to die, they found him in the woods, alone—Keshoo decides what to do with him." A small boy at the crowd's edge informed her, squirming nearer.

She parted the crowd; stood beside her grandfather, and looked down into the unconscious face of Dan, plainly lit by the fire.

For an instant everything swirled round her, then she had leaped to his side with a cry, her hands fluttering over him.

Her grandfather's astounded voice turned her to him, and she flung her arms around his neck, her lips at his ear.

"It is he—of whom I told thee—who felled the man at the Shwe Dagon, who saved me. Oh, haste—"

It was enough. The old man sprang to his feet, words of command striking here, there.

"Quick, quick, send for the *hpungi*, and old Mai-paya with her herbs—*quick*—" Shahli-Mar's voice bit like a whip, and one of the men leaped as if cut across the shoulders, and made off at a run down the village street. "Prepare hot water—oh Lord of the Middle Way let it not be too late." She bent in agony over the still figure.

Uproar insued. They carried the unconscious man to Shahli-Mar's own bed. Here the *hpungi*, racing in with Mai-paya, fat and ancient, bearing her little bag of herbs, found her as they panted up the steps into the house.

Mai-paya set the long limp figure east and west, to have benefit of the earth-currents. Then she brewed stinking drinks over a fire and poured them down Dan's throat, while Shahli-Mar held up his head, and the *hpungi's* rosary clicked like a sewing machine, and he invoked every powerful spirit of the Burmese-Buddhist hierarchy. She laid a lump of fresh fat upon the wound, and drenched it with thick ointment and bound it fast; most curious of all, she opened a tiny artery in his arm, inserted a small copper tube, dropped in liquid, and blew mightily into the other end, forcing the contents into the blood.

All night they worked, under the Cooper oil lamp, while outside the village gossiped and whispered, with wonderment, and suppressed giggles as some broad joke was tossed across the changing crowd. The comeliness of the young *sahib*, Shahli-Mar's instant panic, were not unnoted. Tongues wagged.

And, when long after midnight the man's body began to bead with sweat and the ghastly putty color of his skin turned, inch by inch, to a deep flush, the old woman lifted her eyes to Shahli-Mar's rigid face, and nodded. Whereon she tumbled over in a little heap and sobbed. Mai-paya and the *hpungi* exchanged glances, and she gathered up her utensils.

"Listen child," she laid a gentle hand on the heaving shoulder, "he will sleep long. When he wakes, no food but boiled milk, and one of these," she laid half a dozen quinine capsules beside the lamp. "He will be weak, and he must not take fever. And if thou need me, call." They went out.

SLEEP he did; twenty-four hours of it, deep, healing sleep; he came out of it enough to drink the hot milk and swallow the quinine without attaining real consciousness, and slid away again. This was at noon. That evening, however, with a great sigh, he opened clear eyes and saw a dark face bend swiftly down to him, slim hand reach out to his own. The face perplexed him.

"Who?" his voice was weak as the hand he tried to raise. She laid a finger on his lips.

"Not talk," came a whisper. "Rest. Sleep." He obeyed.

Next morning he was quite clear, ravenously hungry, and tossing with curiosity. They told him all they knew, Shahli-Mar and the grim-faced old Keshoo, and he supplemented it with what had happened till his memory failed. Shahli-Mar turned to her grandfather.

"This is the work of those devils of Kim-Popal; their fathers were devils and their mothers were the daughters of hairless she-pigs; their aunts—" she crisply defined their pedigree till her grandfather stopped her with remarks of his own. She listened, then translated to the wondering man.

"My grandfather, he say that you are fools to dig for gold there. Yess, indeed. There is not gold there. Oh no. He is veree wise, and he knows."

"I'll say he knows," muttered Dan. But he made no comment. His own discovery was after all not his own.

They fed him for two days, and at the end of that time, because he was young and healthy, the last traces of the poison had departed; his wound was well to healing. And all during that time, they talked; as he lay on the floor of the half-open outer room.

They told him of the coming of men, months before, to the forest; of the clearing of the trees, and the building of the corrugated iron warehouse, and of how they had gone away again. They told him of their long feud, rising almost to the point of battle, with the people of Kim-Popal, who were mixed Chin and Burmese. Of who had directed the attack on him they could tell nothing, save that, most emphatically, it was not the casual work of forest thieves-dacoits.

Through the talk, Shahli-Mar's English grew easier as she used it again, he sensed strongly the antipathy of the old man; his inbred dislike and distrust of the whites. Sensed equally the quality of the look he surprised, or thought he surprised, once or twice in Shahli-Mar's eyes.

And as he watched her vivid face, he was perplexed, time and again, by its familiarity. Something about the eyes, the set of the head, but it always eluded him.

She flatly refused to let him go the second day; he was too weak. But when on the third, he stood up and quietly announced he was going, he found a canoe had been arranged and men gotten to take him down. Old Keahoo escorted him, with smiling villagers, to the gates; the *hpungi* droned a blessing, and the old man, half ironically, bent in a salaam.

"He says," Shahli-Mar translated his reply to Dan's thanks—"Thatt is all right; it is good to help others. But he says you not to come back. Noah. He do not want *thakins* digging in the ground for gold—there is no gold."

Dan laughed. "All right. But I'm afraid I'll have to take a chance and come." He turned to the girl in good-bye, but she shook her head.

"I go to the river," she said, so they set off through the forest, the men who were to paddle the canoe, a villager or so, and Shahli-Mar chatting merrily beside Dan. They followed a faint footpath, a short cut reducing the distance to barely two miles.

He held out his hand; she laid it, with a quick, proud gesture, against her breast, and he found himself tongue-tied; mumbled thanks, inane words of "meet again" and hopped into the waiting canoe. She stood quite still on the bank, her hands folded over her bosom, beside the two villagers who had walked two miles to witness the departure.

Then, as the paddles lifted, she spoke rapidly to the villagers beside her, tossed her head, and suddenly leaped into the canoe beside him.

"I go with you," she announced, and before the amazed Dan could reply, "*Shur shaigan*" she cried to the paddlers, ("away quickly") and the long craft was shooting through the smooth water.

FOR a time, anxiety to reach Rangoon, the burden of the devastating knowledge he carried, cut disagreeable interims across the enchantment of that homeward voyage. Then, with one large shrug of his mind, Dan dismissed them entirely and settled to the enjoyment of the moment. The East had taught him this much.

At each turn of the stream, Shahli-Mar, with the important delight of a child, would explain the country.

"There is the Hpang-Suu," pointing to a vast ruined pagoda emerging from trees. "Long time ago, Lord Buddha came, like a beggar, and begged. The *hpungis*, veree rich, did not give him anything. Then he went away in sad. And Nangh, who lives in the veree big wind came and blew down the *stupa*, and all the *hpungis* died under the bricks."

She showed him where the hardwood had been cut and floated down the river tied to rafts of bamboo; explained the use of cutch-dye, as a boat with a red sail floated by, and commented on the manners of villages they passed in words that made him gasp, and with an entire innocence of offense that made him roar with laughter.

She was immensely interested in his "digging in the ground for gold," and listened round-eyed while he tried to explain the Stuba No. 14, and its workings. He talked as to a child.

"It is a big big machine," he said—"like one of the boats that go on the river—only—only it goes on land. It comes in pieces, and then you look at a picture of it on a big blue paper, and put it together, just as the picture tells you. And then it moves in a lake of its own—we'll make the stream where you found me do that—and digs, and it makes a very loud noise."

She nodded wisely. "When you come back with that big machine, Dhan-star-et?"

"I think," he answered grimly, "that I'll come pretty damned soon."

She told him of her life, her grandfather—spoke with utter casualness of her unknown parentage and her mixed blood. It was Dan who flushed with pity. She described her stay in Yandoon, where she had learned English.

Through its clipped and quaint medium,

he received a vivid picture of the gay, careless, casual Burmese life; *pwes* (tea-parties) devised suddenly, and lasting for three days, the guests bringing their own food, and sometimes their own bedding; ardent pilgrimages across country to Pagan or Rangoon, stopping to visit and talk. It gave him the sense of a fluid, loosely woven, richly spontaneous life almost unthinkable in a civilization whose material possessions were roots and chains.

"But why," said Dan suddenly, "Why did you go away right after I saw you that time at the Shwe Dagon?"

"Oh, that," Shahli-Mar was elaborately careless, but the color came up in her cheeks, "thatt was because I came on pilgrimage, you see, and I had found what I wanted. Then my grandfather he got sick, so I go home. And I wait. The Lord Buddha, he had sent me a vision. So I knew it would come, and it did come," a sufficiently involved remark whose meaning, however, she illuminated with an unmistakable smile.

All that day she showed unquestionably that she loved him. She was as naïve as a child. And yet beneath this artlessness—hands that patted his throat, and fingers that explored his thick copper hair—he felt at moments—as when she stopped in mid-sentence, and looked at him, drawing back a little—a wisdom vastly older, deeper, than anything he knew; a knowledge of all good and evil as impersonal as a god's.

And when night came, and the tired paddlers, one by one, left the canoe to the steersman and the current, she curled up against him with a loud sigh, snuggled, giggled, shivered deliciously, and went to sleep! Or certainly seemed to. It amused him vastly, and for some obscure reason, made him a little indignant. Also it called out all the protective tenderness in him. His arms grew numb through the long night, but he was careful to shift them gently.

They slid up to a wharf in the soft vagueness of the morning mist to the voluble astonishment of fishermen going out with nets and poles. Dan turned to Shahli-Mar, a little uncertainly. But she was still in charge. She hopped nimbly up on the wharf and bent down to him.

"The third night," she said softly, "come to the Shwe Dagon, same place you saw me. I go to my people here. You go to your place and get ready to come back with the machine that comes in pieces, to dig for the gold, yes. You go to the Bank of Burma, where you sit and smoke in the mornings, at a table, doing nothing. The table is in a large room with many *punkahs* (fans) it is in the corner by a window." She stepped back and looked at him, her eyes snapping with amusement at his sudden jaw-dropped look.

"But"—he spluttered— "how do you know that?"

"Because Pyang-Dhal, that young boy with me, I tell him stay in Rangoon, and see you are all right, when I had to go back. So he works in the Bank of Burma as sweeper. Now you pay thee men who paddle, please. Good-bye, Dhan-star-et," and before Dan could move, she had run away and vanished lightly in the morning vapor.

CHAPTER VII

THEY sat round a table in Samford's private office; Samford, Sir Edward, Langhorn, manager of the Bank of Burma, and one or two available directors, and listened while he told his story; listened with expressions that slowly altered from anxious interest through doubt to incredulity. There was a little silence when he finished. He had carefully avoided theories; he had stated merely events as they had happened.

Sir Edward broke the silence with a cough, a little gesture of bewilderment.

"But really, Starrett this—this is incredible, you know. Natives don't—" he broke off abruptly, shaking his head.

Langhorn, sixty, quiet, removed his cigar.

"Perhaps you can tell us, Mr. Starrett, just why you took this trip. Apparently it was quite—er, unauthorized."

Dan met his look squarely. "Entirely, Mr. Langhorn. I took it on myself. Because I'd made every effort," his gaze shifted an instant to Samford, heavy lids drooped as usual above his cigarette, "to look over the ground before I went up with my dredge. I'd been here a month; nothing had moved. I didn't know what I might encounter, and I had no intention," he emphasized the words quietly, "of slipping up on the time-clause of our contract."

There was another silence. Samford never moved. Then Sir Edward with a nervous cough: "But this—er—this 'panning' you speak of. That is the point.

You say the material you tested only assayed—what was it—a cent per cubic yard. That is manifestly absurd."

"That's what I thought." Dan swept the reserved faces. "That's why I thought I'd better report it to you." He felt himself flushing under that incredulous look.

Then Samford spoke; without looking up, without lifting his chin from his hand.

"When Starrett told me this yesterday, I thought you ought to know it. That's why I called you here today."

"Very decent of you, Allan." Wrexham, an old civil service man, looked round at the others, and made no attempt to conceal his contempt as he eyed Dan.

"I don't suppose, sir," he drawled, "that you expect any of us to believe this tale, do you? You've been in the country just a month. We know nothing about your knowledge. Mr. Samford's spent his life here and has a national reputation as an engineer. Preposterous, I call it."

"By your own account," added Langhorn gently, for he liked Dan, "you were off your head from that poison—jolly bad off, too. It's wicked stuff."

"That wasn't till after," flashed Dan. "I tested for six hours before that. Different levels, different pits."

"Then you miscalculated, my dear Starrett" cut in Sir Edward excitedly, "or your methods were too rough."

A wave of anger lifted Dan to his feet, and he swept the indifferent or hostile faces with blazing eyes.

"All right," he snapped, "it's no good talking to you. You won't believe me. All I ask is give me a chance to prove it. Get my dredge up there and let's start operations." He caught Samford's eyes on him, and read behind their smiling calm a most deadly hatred. It was like fuel on his baffled, mounting anger. His voice shook. "I may not have spent my life in Burma, and I don't claim to be a great engineer. But give me a week of operation and I'll prove everything I say." He snatched up his hat. "And I'll say this right now. The river will start dropping in ten days. If I don't get located up there by that time, I'll break the contract and start suit for obstruction." He strode out, flaming.

The comments after his departure were largely in the same key. "Insolence" and "hot-headed young idiot . . . well what can you expect from an American." Only as the men began leaving did Langhorn speak. He turned to Samford casually, and none but an acute observer would have noticed the cool speculation in his eyes.

"Oh, I say Samford, better get along with those barges, hadn't you? After all—the boy has been here a month. And, er—we don't want any suits on our hands. Machinery of that type's too far off."

"Rather! Matter of fact, the barges have been ready since the day after Starrett disappeared up country. He can start loading tomorrow."

He smiled easily, but inside him, something turned a little cold. Starrett, despite his failure, had forced his hand. He had not missed Langhorn's look. The first seed of doubt had been planted.

WHILE this conference was going on in the Bank of Burma, another of quite a different sort was transpiring across the city. By the mossy *tankh* of the old Shiwar Temple beyond the Shwe Dagon, Shahli-Mar sat tossing bits of bread to the sacred fish, and talking rapidly to Pyang-Dhal. She talked a long time, and that slim youth alternately stared and glanced uneasily over his shoulder. She wound up with the trip down the river.

"And now," she finished, "thou knowest all. Did I not say I had a vision? But oh, Pyang-Dhal, when I thought he was going to die, my heart was near to cracking. It was the noseless sons of she-pigs from Kim-Popal; yes—but why?" she frowned thoughtfully. "Hast thou seen aught strange?"

The boy's face darkened. "Two days after *Sahib* Starrett went away, there came the *Rajah-Sahib* (boss) Samford, very quietly, at the end of the day, when no one was there. He looked in all the holes of *Sahib* Starrett's table, and took out papers, and read them. Then frowned, and went away, swearing. I think he did not find it, whatever it was. I observed all from the door, unseen."

"When men go to search like thieves, first it is hands, and then it is knives." Shahli-Mar quoted a native proverb. "He must be told. I cannot wait till tomorrow. I must find him in his own place, tonight." She tossed her last bit of bread into the *tankh*, and rose. The boy's troubled look deepened to one of actual terror.

"Shahli-Mar." It was hardly more than a whisper.

"Ai!" she looked round, startled by his tone. "What is it?"

"There is something else I have not told thee," he glanced round, snapped his fingers, then looked at her with the fear-haunted eyes of which only the superstitious are capable.

"Nay" Shahli-Mar tossed her head, though her fingers snapped quickly and she glanced toward the gathering shadows under the banyans. "I am not afraid of *beloos*. What would'st thou say?"

The boy crept near. "I scarce dare say it. Thou—thou hast a *hundit* (double)."

"Nay!" She hastily drew the magic circle on her breast, feeling herself grow cold. Of all the dreads that haunt the superstitious laden brain of the Burmese, the fear of a double is the worst. Only the *churrel*, the nightmare woman who died in childbirth, and whose body is reversed at the waist, exceeds it in terror. "Where hast thou seen?"

He nodded fearfully. "One day upon the Street of Bazaars. She went in a mota-carr, that she drove herself, dressed as a *sahiba*—I saw."

Shahli-Mar's common sense was coming back to her. She laughed. "Nay, this is child's talk. Thou saw someone, a *sahiba*, thou saids't, and she resembled me somewhat. That is all. I fear no *belloos* and such things, to frighten babes. I have saved a *sahib* and I speak *Englishi*. Yess, by God, I am not a-fraid."

But as they walked down the darkening streets, she was very careful not to pass to the left of anyone she met, and she tramped half a mile out of her way to cross running water.

In the concluding chapters Shahli-Mar meets her double, and Starrett succeeds in taking the dredge up the Irawaddy.

Caissons

By ARED WHITE

LIEUTENANT SWIFT'S bronzed hands were those of a man with palsy this morning as he stood in front of his battery commander's quarters, his staring gray eyes fixed upon the small sheet of paper that danced unsteadily in his trembling fingers.

His affliction could come from no ordinary matter of his death warrant. His whole appearance of rugged body and stout, stolid nerves were those of a man equal to meeting that emergency without exhibition of stress. Lieutenant Swift was broad, muscular, lithe of body and quick of mind; strong enough to lift a caisson clear of the ground, keen enough to throw a war-strength battery into action with all the swift fury of a hawk swooping upon its prey. No finer physical specimen had come into the service with those millions that answered the call of war.

"It's for your own good, Swift," said the trim young battery commander, a note of sympathetic explanation in his voice. "I hated worst way to do it—but then it's the best plan of hiding you out until this barrage of logarithms and ballistics has blown over. We'll soon be moving to the front and once we're there—"

The lieutenant continued staring in abject wretchedness at the order. It relieved him as executive officer of the battery and relegated him to the prosaic duties of caisson lieutenant. No matter what the captain said the order could be only a harbinger of disaster to his further service in the field artillery, to the fulfilment of his fondest dream of ultimate battery command. It had come to him only now what his service with the battery had grown to mean to him.

"They may not ever let me get up to the front," he pondered heavily, folding the document slowly, his hands steadying as the first shock of this dire tragedy spent itself. "If I've got to work out everything by higher mathematics in order to hold the grade, I'm—I'm lost. I can do it all—but I can't do it that way."

"That's just why I'm hiding you out among the caissons," the battery commander quickly assured his deposed second

"Where e'er you go
You will always know
that those cais-sons
are rolling along"

in command. "You can do your stuff to my satisfaction and I can supply all the mathematics they ever put between the covers of the math books. But I need you because you've got, along with all the qualifications any artillery will ever need, that invisible line that runs up and down a man's backbone and makes it rigid—the fifth dimension. Now, where would I be with that there mathematical genius when we get the battery up where things are breaking hard!"

The captain jerked a scornful finger towards his new senior first lieutenant who had been forced upon him the day before without comment by the new regimental commander. The battery's acquisition, fresh from a training camp, was mincing his way down the battery street in twenty inch strides of his spindle legs. He was slightly stooped, slightly flat-chested and decidedly hatchet-faced. Hung across his long, beakish nose was a pair of gold rimmed glasses from behind which mild, brown eyes looked out in a detached, absent-minded sort of stare. It was a sight to provoke the mirth of the hard-boiled cannoneers and they were wont to snicker almost openly when the new lieutenant sang out commands in a thin, shrill little voice.

"He can murder calculus," mused the captain, "but imagine him putting the game across when boche shrapnel and H. E. was flying thick and the battery was in a pinch!"

HIGHER mathematics was, indeed, an open book to the new lieutenant and he fared well in the newly aroused craze for intricate formulas that had been infused into the fervid favor of the high command by the French artillery experts. He seemed to know nothing much about the practical sides of field artillery. He had been on a horse only at equitation exercises in preliminary training. He lacked voice or command personality. But anything he missed in soldierly appearance and the hard side of the artillery business, he made up in mathematical performance. He could juggle logarithms dexterously, laugh at the most intricate problems in trigonometry and expound calculus with easy facility. Dynamics, kinemetics and ballistics were a part of his nature and the first time he saw a range finder he was able to calibrate it by mathematical formula. Just before the war broke out he had majored in mathematics at college, so he boasted, and he bade fair to major in the artillery if the craze for higher mathematical expertness held out in the theoretical training behind the lines.

"Anyhow, he may be of a lot more use to you than I'd be if you have to use those higher fandangles in working the guns," Lieutenant Swift added, despairingly. "I simply can't get all of this new stuff they're shooting at us, and attend to my other duties."

The battery commander gave him a hearty and cheering slap on the back. "Cheer up," he exclaimed. "You've got everything that'll ever be needed at the front—maps, arithmetic, some geometry, some little 'trig,' a lot of common sense—and the indispensable fifth dimension that makes a fellow stick by his guns and the men stick by him until hades freezes over. Take the battery out alone this morning and maybe you'll feel better."

Lieutenant Swift brightened somewhat. Not only were the captain's assurances stimulating to his injured morale but the prospect of having the battery all to himself this morning offered rare adventure. He sat reminiscently in his quarters until drill time, searching his past experiences in this new business of war training for grains of comfort.

He found cheer in recollection of that first dire uneasiness in which he had entered the service to begin with. Had not those fears come to nothing? Years ago that seemed to him now, reckoned in the transformation the service had wrought in him. Yet, by the calendar, it was little more than a year since that day he had followed the military band to the recruiting office and offered himself as a sacrifice. He remembered that no flush of adventure had warmed his heart then. He had gone with deep forebodings, in something of the mood that a man goes in the night to the death bed of his next of kin.

Then, within the first month, he had answered reveille one morning under the spell of a miracle. War suddenly had ceased to be the reeking monster that had sneered at him from caisson and cantonment in haunting threat of mysterious violence. The field artillery had gotten into his blood and brain over night. It was as if the rolling caissons had fanned into life from inner recesses of his being, some latent instinct from remote ancestors who must have served ancient cannon with grape and cannister.

That awakening came back to him now vividly. That morning when he found himself no longer the tranquil man of peaceful instincts, but a creature of the rolling, roaring artillery! It had grown upon him until the very sight of the guns and caissons, taut cannoneers, swaying riders, straining wheel horses and prancing saddle mounts, set his pulse to pounding, his heart to singing. He became as a young man in love—his every thought of his beloved battery. At meals he came to ponder over the condition of *matériel* and men and horses. He would awaken in the night to dwell upon firing data and battery maneuvers. Week ends, when others might go afield for recreation, it had been his habit to spend his time about the picket lines, or among the guns, or in his tent with the text books, forever perfecting himself in the most approved subtleties of hurling high explosives, shrapnel or poison gases at his luckless fellow mortals from across the Rhine.

And the reward of this devotion had been his rapid rise in the service. It reassured him now, the memory of his promotion. Corporal—Sergeant—Second Lieutenant—First Lieutenant. All within the single crowded year. He had met every test, he had won the confidence of his battery commander, he had won the devotion of his men.

He was ready now for duty at the front, fit and praying for the day when his regiment at last should leave this final training area overseas and take its place on the seething front.

It must be incredible, after all, he tried to assure himself, that he would be wrecked by this black phantom of higher mathematics. Surely, with the captain's help, he would be able to escape the pitfalls of those suddenly demanded formulas, and go to the front with his command. A mild smile played on his boyish face at the thought that the battle front, which a year ago had wracked him with its omen of strange crimson terrors, now loomed before him as his haven of refuge.

II

THE mounted orderly who had been waiting outside the quarters for him climbed from the saddle and came in with a tense salute.

"Sir, the Lieutenant's horse is ready," the orderly announced in a voice that conveyed a hint that the lieutenant's horse had been held in waiting some time.

Lieutenant Swift dismissed the last of his forebodings summarily as he swung lightly into the military saddle and trotted off to lead the waiting battery into the open maneuver terrain that lay west of the battery billets.

The rolling guns quickly claimed him as he rode buoyantly along the flank of the battery, appraising every man, horse and item of equipment. His whole being was merged now in the battery, even the dire threat of calculus wiped out by the compelling spirit of the rolling machine of war that this morning must respond to his every mood and touch. As he raised his arm three times in signal for increased gait, his voice rose spontaneously against the clatter of hoof and wheel in the fighting hymn of the field artillery:

Over hill, over dale,
We have hit the dusty trail
And our cais-sons go roll-ing along.
In and out, hear them shout:
"Counter march" and "Right about"!
And our cais-sons go roll-ing along.

His pulse rose to the song as the pulse of the field artilleryman always rises to that song, his blood responding to the irresistibly beautiful thing of blood and steel that rolled along in barbaric magnificence beside him. As the battery swept into the open country he lifted his strong voice out of the song into command:

"Form double section column—caissons by the left flank. Trot—mar-r-r-c-h!" And a moment later as the new formation completed itself perfectly, "Left front into line, trot, mar-r-r-c-h!"

His arm rose three time as the battery steadied down into line. Then four times as he signalled his own mount into the gallop. The battery plunged forward to the mad beating of plunging hoofs and pounding wheels, riders swaying lightly and forcing their horses on without the lash, men on the caissons taking the heavy jolts with carefree, well trained ease. The lieutenant's pulse and his voice rose to the wild spirit of the gallop:

Then it's hi! hi! hee!
In the field ar-til-ler-e-ee.
Shout out your numbers good and strong—
Where e'er you go, you will al-ways know
That those cais-sons are roll-ing along.
Keep them rolling!

He broke off again to raise his voice, as his arm swung in signal. Above the rumble of the battery his command reached the nearby cannoneers. "Act-ion front!"

The horses were back in the trot and on their haunches in a cloud of dust almost before the ring of his voice was out of the air and in a moment the No. 1 gunners had leaped from the limbers, drawn the pintle latches and let the trails drop almost in unison. Limbers and horses dashed to the rear, caissons were rushed into place beside the guns, tubes were swung to the front, gun crews stood ready to serve their weapons. Out of the momentary chaos there emerged a battery ready for combat.

Lieutenant Swift glanced at his watch as the movement was perfected and smiled in satisfaction. It had taken fourteen seconds less than two minutes—the record for his battery. He rode at a trot down the front of the guns, his boyish face beaming, his whole manner eloquent of approval and satisfaction. Were they in front of the enemy his guns even now would be belching death across the hill crests. He rubbed his hands in satisfaction as he gave the command to rest and dismounted from his horse. He was ready for the front, he assured himself—if the enemy was to be met with blood and steel rather than by blackboard and long columns of mysterious symbols.

This moment of exultation was shattered by the unmistakable omen he read in the slow reflective gait of his battery commander who appeared suddenly in the foreground. The portend was certain. The captain had not intended coming to the battery this morning. If his purpose was to observe, he would trot up briskly and take position on a convenient flank. If he brought glad tidings of orders to the front, he would dash up at the full gallop.

As he went out to meet his captain, that officer's words confirmed the fear that had gripped his heart.

"You've been selected for the field artillery course at Samur, Swift," the captain announced, trying to speak lightly as if there was no great significance in his words. "You and Specs go from my battery. I'm glad to get rid of him but it's going to be tough with you away for six weeks."

Lieutenant Swift tried to suppress outward evidence of the flood of misery that swept him within. "Very good, sir," he responded in the grim voice of a disciplined man accepting his death sentence. "I'm sorry, of course, to leave the battery."

"Ah, don't take it that way, Swift," the captain cheered him. "I know what you're thinking—but the worst that can happen is you'll be sent back to your battery—and that isn't going to hurt you with me or the major. Maybe you'll pull through in spite of the mathematics they'll throw at you there. And once at the front—"

"Very good, sir," repeated the lieutenant, saluting grimly.

He turned to his battery again and put it in motion, carrying it through the morning's instruction period. Then packing his field equipment and meager personal effects, he boarded the evening train for Samur, his drawn face and dumb silence in vivid contrast with the high humor of the smiling and effervescent Specs who accompanied him.

III

CALAMITY swept down upon him swiftly at Samur. Two weeks later he stood face to face with the confirmation of his worst fear. Judgment was pronounced by a robust school functionary of the grade of major in whose small black eyes, that looked out through thick horn-rimmed lenses, there shone no glimmer of compassion.

"The instructors report you deficient in the necessary mathematical training for the artillery," the officer charged him in a sharp matter-of-fact voice that went well with the cold eyes.

"Sir, I can compute firing data—I can read maps—I can handle a battery and figure angles under all conditions," Lieutenant Swift replied firmly, pride rising to obscure his wretchedness of spirit and his certain knowledge that this was the end, no matter what he might say.

"Your regimental commander has confirmed our recommendation that you be sent to Blois for re-classification," the major droned, something in his voice suggesting that he enjoyed this interview. He smiled with a downward turn of his open mouth and a slight lifting of his heavy nose. "Perhaps they can use you in trench mortars—or the infantry." The smile expanded. "There is always the chemical warfare service for uneducated persons."

Lieutenant Smith took his travel orders from the major without word, saluted stiffly and marched from the room, his leaden feet rising and falling with an effort. As he went down the long corridor of the administration building, blinded by the poignant agony of abject failure he was brought to a halt by a hand on his arm. He saw his fellow lieutenant from B Battery through the haze of his emotions.

"Why, what's the matter, Lieutenant?" Specs asked solicitiously. "You look like you'd swallowed a fly for breakfast."

"They're not sending me back to the old battery," said Lieutenant Swift in a despairing hoarse whisper.

The friendly eyes beneath the spectacles wore a puzzled look for an instant. Then they began to sparkle. Specs reached out and gave Lieutenant Swift's hand a hearty jerk of understanding felicitation. "Good for you—good for you!" he exulted. He leaned close to his brother officer's ear and poured out his own joy. "Me too—no more battery duty for me," he chuckled. "The first ten in the class at the end of the course gets first call for assignment as instructors at the new artillery schools. It's a cinch for me with my knowleege of math to get one of those berths. I hope you get something just as good!"

Lieutenant Swift went dumbly, as a man in whom all joy of life is dead, to the Army's port of forsaken souls—Blois on the placid Loire. For him the service had been stripped of its glamour. What happened hereafter did not matter much. The mood in which he had gone to war in the first place was back in his heart, except that he was tortured now by the dull void of his existence rather than by squeamish fear of violence.

The dismal, forlorn streets of the wretched "Ville de Blooey" with its crowds of heavy faces and dragging feet, chilled him to the marrow. His misery found no comfort in the company of these throngs of fellow unfortunates about him. He saw with gloomy impersonal interest that all grades and branches of the service were represented among the Army's misfits and throwbacks that had been sent in for salvage. On every lip there were tales of intrigue, injustice, jealousy that had robbed them of command or assignment. The garrulous, who told their troubles freely, blamed everyone but themselves for their unhappy lot.

High ranking officers came and went, their faces seeming to Lieutenant Swift to reflect his own unhappy mood. They, too, had been weighed in the military scales and found wanting. He listened idly for a time to the sour news and gossip that was in the air. An artillery colonel had shot himself through the head the night before rather than face the disgrace of his relief from command. A brigade general had spurned rear-area eagles and gone back nobly to the front with oak leaves on his shoulders to lead a battalion in battle. All at Blois would be sent home in disgrace! Congress was about to investigate the mess!

He turned with a groan from this fetid atmosphere. He had no taste for airing his own failure. He had no room in his heart for the troubles of the others. His re-classification, whatever that might mean and bring, was set for the third day thereafter. He spent those days strolling somberly alone back and forth along the banks of the lazy Loire. The nights were eternities of dull, staring, sleepless misery.

ON THE morning of his third day at Blois, he found himself standing with little interest or excitement, before the re-classification officer who held his future. The officer was a lieutenant colonel of infantry, alert of eye and pleasant of voice. He sat behind a broad desk and watched the lieutenant closely without appearing to do so.

"Your record card shows that you lacked the essential mathematical foundation for the artillery," began the officer casually, as if it were a commonplace of routine, this sorting of military misfits.

"Yes, sir," assented Lieutenant Swift, tersely. He knew that remonstrance or explanation was useless. He would at least fully preserve his self-respect and find refuge in the formal official reserve of manner the service had taught him.

"What do you think you want to do now, Lieutenant?" the senior officer next inquired, pleasantly.

"Whatever duty I'm assigned to, sir—since the field artillery is closed to me." Lieutenant Swift replied firmly but without spirit.

The lieutenant colonel looked at him searchingly as if he sought to confirm an impression the lieutenant's tones had given. A steady stream of military failures passed under his eyes and he flattered himself that he had become expert in sensing the stuff they were made of—whether they were men of the true mould, or weaklings whose minds balked as the front loomed before them in something the way a cow withholds milk under stress. The steadiness and glint of the eye, the vibrations of the voice, from these he found his index. In two minutes of conversation he could detect the most adroitly hidden yellow streak in the whole Army. It was his proudest boast.

"There are two assignments I can give you, Lieutenant Swift," proceeded the examining officer absently. His voice became honeyed. "The first is a detail with station in the city of Paris. Your duty would be to meet and look out for important civil officials arriving from the United States on secret missions. You would have to meet them at the train, arrange their hotel accommodations, auto transportation, and plan their travel itineraries if they had travel authority. The duty is somewhat light—possibly only two or three days a week—but you can see its importance. Of course, you would be provided with a military car and an allowance for expenses."

He paused and studied the young officer's reaction to this alluring picture. Lieutenant Swift's set face betrayed no flicker of interest. His manner remained stiffly official, wholly impersonal.

"Sir, what is the other detail you mentioned?" the lieutenant inquired curtly.

"Front line duty with infantry," was the quick reply, the lieutenant colonel's voice becoming hard and dismal. "The losses are getting to be something frightful. Might last an hour if you're lucky. Men are badly needed—but the life is hell—and I can't advise it!"

"Sir," responded Lieutenant Swift, without a moment's hesitation, his steady eye looking back squarely, "I accept duty with the infantry."

The lieutenant colonel laughed lightly. "I knew it," he exclaimed. "I knew it the moment I saw your eyes and heard the sound of your voice. Of course, there isn't any such detail as the one I told you about first—but you'd be surprised how many complaining hell-roarers grab for it. That gives me their measure and I know what to do with them. They got no place in the Army."

He extended his hand, conceiving it to be his duty to give new life to those who proved worthy of salvage from the military wreckage. "You'll make good at the front," he assured the lieutenant. "The infantry may be new to you for a time, but you can be attached to a line company without responsibility until you learn your stuff—and once you do you'll be off the artillery for life. The infantry's the life. You will leave tonight for a division that you'll find in position just this side of Château Thierry. Best of luck."

This unexpected hand of fellowship lightened the canker of wretchedness that gnawed his heart. But it fired him with no enthusiasm to carry into the great adventure of the front lines. He was simply going to do a man's part in the great emergency. It was the spirit he'd got out of the service. It was now his duty to be a target—a willing and inevitable target. He had no training for service other than in the field artillery, but whatever his new role should prove to be he would put his best into it. If death was the immediate price of this new venture, he'd meet it unflinchingly and in the full possession of the unyielding self-respect whose value his battery commander had taught him. If he had failed where his senior first lieutenant of the gold rimmed glasses had suceeded at Samur, he reflected, at least he had proved himself today by holding out for a man's part.

IV

ON THE reverse slope of an oak-clustered hillock, just out of sight of the broad shimmering ribbon of the Marne whose tortuous course he had followed during this last of two days' travel by rail and truck, Lieutenant Swift finally located the battle P. C. of the ——th United States Infantry. He had been informed by the replacement receiving officer who had sent him there that he must report to the colonel of this regiment personally. The colonel insisted upon interviewing immediately any and all officers, of whatever grade, assigned or attached to his proud regiment in any capacity. The field artillery cross-guns remained on the lieutenant's collar. He would not remove them until he was ordered to.

Except for an occasional reverberating crash that awakened lazy echoes along the Marne, he had seen little hint of the hostile front. The whole countryside lay in an aspect of soothing tranquillity, quite in keeping with this hot Sunday in mid July. Roads further back had been jammed with troops and trucks and with endless guns and caissons whose sight had added a moment of poignant misery to his heartsickness.

The colonel to whom he reported was a bristling, bustling, spare little man in his early fifties. When not snapping out commands, the colonel spoke in a sort of cutting drawl, and with small patience for new officers before they had managed to fit themselves into his scheme of things and prove their mettle to his complete satisfaction. Once accepted, an officer became an integral part of his feudal province and the colonel's world was theirs. He took in Lieutenant Swift and his orders at a sharp glance, his eyes resting for a moment on the artillery collar ornaments.

"So you're one of those bright lads who couldn't learn artillery?" he growled.

"Sir, I was relieved from the artillery and ordered to report here for duty," replied Lieutenant Swift, flushing deeply, but returning the colonel's stare without flinching.

"It might interest you, young man," the colonel announced disagreeably, "to know that it takes a whole lot more spine and just as much brain to make an infantryman. And the sooner some of our four-eyed marms who fight the war in chateaux back behind the lines find that out the sooner this war's going to end. Do you understand that!"

"I am here, sir, in obedience to my orders," rejoined Lieutenant Swift coolly, fortified by the official dignity that is the haven of junior officers.

The regimental commander mellowed slightly. There was something fine and firm in this young officer's poise. His refusal to be scared or angered by the bluster of higher authority pleased the colonel secretly.

"What do you know about infantry?" he demanded.

"Nothing, sir," confessed the lieutenant.

"Wonder to me they didn't put you on the general staff," drawled the colonel with a caustic chuckle. He glanced over the newcomer's record card. "I see you were a book-keeper before you tried to be an officer?"

Lieutenant Swift winced at this reminder of his dimly forgotten past. Such was the hold upon him of his single year of service that he had all but forgotten he ever was anything other than a field artilleryman.

"Yes, sir," he replied, "but I can learn infantry."

"That," the colonel retorted dryly, "remains to be seen. It seems that you didn't learn the artillery, however, and I wish the whole world to understand that it takes a lot more brains to make a good infantryman."

The forlorn lieutenant accepted the rebuff in stolid silence. The infantry commander, having vented his indignation at the practice of sending artillery duds to the infantry for the duty, turned to the practical disposition of his unwelcome new officer.

"They've sent you here at a sweet time to learn infantry or anything else," the colonel fumed. "The boche storm may break over us at any minute. If the dope we get from a kraut-eating traitor is correct, Fritz will be down the river at daybreak with his whole circus—hell bent for Paris. He's due to start blazing his trail through our dead bodies at one ten in the morning."

He turned on Lieutenant Swift sharply. "You can see what a fine time it is to be sending amateurs out for instruction with our platoons," he went on. "You'd simply add some extra work to the burying details—or add to the sweet scents of battle if they didn't get around to your carcass with a spade. But since I got you on my hands the thing I'm going to do is turn you over to my adjutant here." The colonel indicated a thin, blond youngster whose brows were wrinkled over a bundle of reports in a corner of the dugout. "You're his meat. Maybe you can help him keep books on casualties, or scribble messages, or keep up the diary—or heaven knows what you can do. But your principal mission, if anything does break loose in the night, is to keep out of everyone's way. Speak when you're spoken to. Do what you're told. That's all, Lieutenant!"

That German traitor whom the colonel had quoted dealt in facts. He had betrayed his countrymen with accurate information. At exactly 1:10 o'clock, which was 12:10 by the Allied rule of computing time, a thousand thunder bolts rent the sky. Lieutenant Swift had strolled in a few minutes before midnight from under the star-laden sky. He had been lolling about the nearby crest of the hillock absorbed in the irregular drumming of scattered heavy cannon. The sounds only stirred heavy memories without arousing sense of fear. He had wondered at the serenity with which men came and went from the command dugout. The lively interchange of harassing and interdiction fire seemed a matter of unconcern to them.

The sudden crash at 1:10 o'clock brought him to his feet white and trembling. A furious beating of guns had set in at 1 o'clock from behind—but this opening up ten minutes later was that of the hillsides bursting into furious volcanos, a lashing hurricane smashing buildings to the ground amid pealing, booming, roaring thunder. Its volume rose in a deafening crescendo that filled the whole world with its uproar. Even the monster guns no longer were able to make their mighty voices heard above the din. The gun flashes lighted up the hills and valley of the Marne with the uncanny, flickering glare of sheet lighting.

The colonel came in out of the storm and closed the heavy door of the trembling dugout behind him. His eyes were dancing and his stern presence seemed slightly to relieve the tension in the dugout. The uncontrollable chattering of teeth and quaking of knees grew less pronounced among the others in the command post.

"But we beat them to it by a good ten minutes," roared the colonel in high humor. "Heaven pity the poor boche infantry caught in the crush of our surprise concentration along the river. They'll be torn to pieces before they ever get near their boats in the morning. If our artillery only stand up against their three guns to our one—the Kaiser's wrecked before he ever starts his crew down the Marne valley for Paris!"

THROUGH the endless hours of the night, the storm raged with unrelenting fury. To Lieutenant Swift it became an eternity of unspeakable horror as he sat dumbly in a corner of the dugout, hands clenched, jaw set, striving to hold onto himself and restrain the involuntary chattering of his teeth and the knocking together of his knees. Others in the dugout, staring and disheveled, found some surcease from terror in work that had to be performed. Officers and runners from the field, coming in and out, their blood warmed by the clash, seemed strangely cool and stolid. But Lieutenant Swift was left to feel the wracking agony of abject fear, fear that brought the beads of perspiration to his forehead—the maddening fear of the mere onlooker in the heat of battle.

The break of dawn brought a new and terrible crisis. The howling, roaring tempest increased its unbelievable fury. Runners, staff officers, messengers, staggered in and out of the dugout. Some of them now dripped with wounds. The German infantry was coming over. Buzzers rasped their inarticulate messages. Reports came pouring in endlessly some of them reassuring, some alarming. Machine guns had just sunk five boatloads of German infantry in mid stream. Artillery had bracketed on a German pontoon dotted with enemy troops. A boche machine gun company had landed and been driven into the river. Remnants of an enemy battalion had gained a foothold behind a French railway embankment and were gathering for the assault. The regiment's left company had been overwhelmed and wiped out. Three company commanders were casualties. Two of them refused evacuation—the third died directing his men. German infiltration was continuing from over the Marne. German concentrations were still in the woods across the river waiting to come across!

For hours that were endless the maddening pandemonium raged on and on. Despair added itself to terror as Lieutenant Swift sat vacantly by, with no part in it. The battle of the ages raging and with him a mute, helpless, useless onlooker. The mill of the gods grinding out the destinies of nations in this titanic crisis of all time and he with no bit of grist to carry to the hopper.

He had been reduced in time to a nerve wracked stupor in which he sat with white-lipped open mouth and dull staring eyes, seeing and hearing the swirl about him only as figments of some frightful nightmare from which he could not awaken, when the words of the colonel detached themselves from the uproar with the effect of a bucket of ice water. His mind cleared instantly.

"Artillery's pulled out—you can't mean it!" the colonel howled at a battalion staff officer who had come in suddenly with these tidings of calamity.

"Sir, they been gone nearly an hour!" the staff officer shouted. "We've got to have fire on our right at the river bend or we're in a tight place!"

"You mean it took you an hour—you've wasted a whole hour letting me know our artillery support was gone!" raged the colonel.

"But we saw their guns—we thought they were there until we called for fire a few minutes ago when the boche started running another pontoon onto the river. The French left a whole battery and some scattered guns behind, sir—we never even suspected. They must have gone when Jerry put a concentration on them at nine o'clock. The Germans got their horses—but there aren't many dead Frenchmen."

The colonel raised his clenched hands in violent despair.

"Get machine gun fire on the pontoon somehow—get some automatic rifles over there quick. Start a message through to division headquarters for artillery!" He groaned. "It'll be afternoon before they can get a battalion of guns here—it's critical—critical!"

Lieutenant Swift was on his feet and in front of the colonel on the heels of a sudden overpowering impulse. Terror had deserted him. His mind was clear and alert.

"May I say a word, sir," he fairly demanded.

The colonel turned upon him with blazing eyes. It startled him—this intrusion upon the crushing needs of his every instant.

"I told you to keep out of the way!" he roared. "If you open your mouth be sure you've got something to say!"

Lieutenant Swift lost his poise in the rush of his eagerness. "Sir—I want permission to look at that French battery. If there's guns and ammunition there—and I can have a few men—I can put them in action!"

The colonel raised his hand and his voice to wave the lieutenant back into his useless corner. Then he stopped and changed his mind. Ridiculous as the challenge might sound, it flashed into his logical mind that guns and lieutenant were both worthless at this moment. He had nothing to lose.

"Hop to it!" he ordered, then added with a touch of scorn. "But if you get any guns working—be careful where you point them. We'll furnish you with your targets."

LIEUTENANT SWIFT ran the quarter of a mile to the French artillery position, half dragging the winded runner along with him. His heart beat high as he checked over the abandoned battery—guns, caissons half filled with ammunition, tubes, sights and mechanism undamaged. The ground in rear of the battery was a mass of shell holes, dead animals, scattered harness and French equipment, eloquent of an enemy concentration just over the battery—and of a hasty retreat of the cannoneers, unwilling to drag their guns with them in the absence of horses.

The battalion staff officer came trotting up from the regimental dugout and pointed out the vital river bend on the rank flank. The enemy had sensed a weak point there. The Germans were massing infantry, boats and pontoon equipment for a sudden quick thrust across the river, believing their own guns had destroyed the allied artillery support at this point.

Once across the river in force, the boche could strengthen their precarious foothold on this side and perhaps gather strength to force the valley of the Marne. The stakes were high ones in today's game of war, and a few acres of land on the south bank of the Marne was worth its weight in dead men.

"I can do it—I can do it!" shouted Lieutenant Swift. "All I need now is a few men and I can get these guns to roaring."

"Men are scarce—and the colonel's hanging onto his reserves like a miser this morning," the battalion officer shouted back. "How few men can you make out with?"

"Fifteen will do it—I can make out with fifteen to work the guns," Lieutenant Swift exclaimed. "I'll have to do the laying and instrument work and set the fuses myself—with nothing but infantry to help me!"

The infantry officer dispatched the runner with a frantic message to his major asking fifteen men from the battalion reserve. Lieutenant Swift began a calm survey of his next steps. The guns were screened from overhead observation by high camouflage nets and immediately in front of them was a thicket of scrub oak. By penetrating to the outer edge of this thicket he got a clear view of the river bend. He made no effort to locate the battery O. P. since all the technical work at the guns must depend upon his resourcefulness. He must observe, direct and deliver fire—an almost insuperable task, but one which necessity demanded of him.

He gave an exclamation of joy as he examined the sights on the first gun. To the best of his calculation they had been left by the French fully adjusted for fire on the river bend. He drew a H. E. shell from the caisson, set the fuse and shoved the shell into the first gun. Then he instructed the infantry officer in the pulling of the lanyard when commanded, scrambled up a leafy oak tree for observation, adjusted his field glasses and shouted "Fire!"

The shell screeched on its way, its shrill voice quickly swallowed up by the crashing echoes of the battle. It seemed to have passed into nothingness until several tense seconds later it appeared just over the water as a sharp spurt of white smoke. The burst was to the right of where it was needed. It told that the wind had shifted since the guns were left. The lieutenant sensed the burst aloud: "Right fifteen."

He climbed down to adjust another shell, lock it into the breech of the gun and scurry back into the tree to observe the effect of its explosion. Five times he did this before he had the shell placed where he wanted it. Then he transferred the plateau and drum readings to the three other guns of the battery, setting them by reciprocal laying on the first gun.

The fifteen men, coming up by short cautious rushes to avoid sniper's fire, reported as he had finished his preparation. He quickly parcelled them out three to each gun and gave them an emphatic but patient five minutes of instruction in their duties as temporary field artillerymen. One man at each gun he designated as gunner. It was his job to set the sights and level the elevation bubble after each shot. The next man served as No. 1 cannoneer, opening and closing the breech and pulling the lanyard. The third man pulled the dust plug from the end of the projectile, inserted the fuse and slammed the shell into the breech. The infantry lieutenant he used to assist the gunners in their more delicate task.

Caissons, gun limbers and caisson limbers were well stocked with high explosive shells and the infantrymen quickly caught the knack of hurling the projectiles from the field guns into the river bend. Within an hour from the time he had left the regimental command post Lieutenant Swift's impromptu gun crews were hurling high explosive shells into the vital river bend at the rate of eight per minute.

The self-delegated battery commander threw himself into his mission with furious energy. He was at this gun, then at that, adjusting sights, searching out ammunition; up the observation tree, down again. His uniform was in shreds, the perspiration streamed from his face, steel helmet and gas mask tossed aside as useless impediments, brown hair a tangled mop. But his gray eyes danced with the godless light of battle and his cheeks were red with the fever of the roaring guns.

He yelled back at his gunners the barbaric joy of what he saw through his field glasses. That last shell made a direct hit on the last vestige of the jettisoned boche pontoon! The German engineers who had not been blown to pieces jumped into the river! A platoon of the enemy was running back into the woods—leaving the wooden boat they had tried to launch. He climbed down to raise the elevation and send his shells into the underbrush just beyond the river bank.

"Keep 'em roaring!" he shouted back at his guns as he observed the havoc of his fire upon the enemy's last refuge. "We're sure stocking up a good sized graveyard over there. What's left of 'em is pulling stakes and getting out as fast as they know how!"

V

IN THE heat of the early afternoon, when the battle fury had lulled and the German designs on the river bend had been abandoned, the wooded slopes in the rear of the battery began teeming with life. A French howitzer battalion lumbered up and went into position on the left. At the same moment groups of dismounted artillerymen filtered forward, led by a black-bearded artillery captain of fierce mien and many decorations.

Lieutenant Swift knew that the real battery commander and his war-weary *enfants* had returned to claim their cannon. He held his own men at the guns until they had fired the few remaining rounds of high explosive shells from the caissons, then assembled them for the return to their battalion. He felt a sharp pang of regret that he must surrender the guns, yet he was stirred by the feeling that he had met the emergency of the river bend and proved himself an artilleryman. He turned to the French captain and saluted by way of turning the seventy-fives back, then made his way wearily back to his new regiment.

At the command dugout, the colonel received Lieutenant Swift with no show of outward enthusiasm. The colonel's comment was brief, his words sharp. The rewards he passed out for duty well performed were not those of empty praise.

"You did your stuff, Swift," the colonel said. "It looks very much as if Fritz has indefinitely postoned his trip to Paris. I'll have time tonight to send your name forward for promotion to captain. You have a place in my regiment from now on. You've got the right stuff in you—we'll teach you the rest."

Lieutenant Swift saluted in reply.

Some days later, when the Germans were firmly started on their way back across the Vesle a few leaps ahead of persistent American bayonets, Lieutenant Swift was summoned to division headquarters. The information came with the summons that he was to take his oath of office as a captain of infantry, general headquarters having validated the colonel's recommendation. The regiment had rejoined its division and the division was now licking its wounds in a rest area while its tattered gaps were filled with replacements.

Lieutenant Swift had said little to anyone at his new regiment. He had gone stolidly about the business of learning infantry tactics, drilling by day and reading the training regulations by night. He had made little progress for the man of achivement he had proved himself to be in front of Château Thierry. At division headquarters he was ushered into the presence of the division commander himself, a heavy, red-faced, gray man whose deep jaws and blue eyes just now were relaxed in friendly repose.

"I am familiar with all the details of your story, Swift," the division general said. "I want to be the first to congratulate you on your promotion. You earned it—and more. I doubt of there's a man in my divisional artillery who could have done better than you—if half as well."

The stolid face of the captain-to-be quickened with sudden interest. The general's words had brought out the glorious fact that with every division of infantry there is a full brigade of field artillery.

"Sir, would it in any way be possible," he asked eagerly, "to have my assignment in your division made to the field artillery, sir?"

The general reflected upon this a moment and shook his head. "There are no vacancies except for lieutenants," he said. "Besides it would take a new set of papers to promote you in the field artillery and that would take time and a lot of explaining."

The lieutenant's face fell—then lighted up again.

"But in my present grade, sir," Lieutenant Swift persisted, "my present commission is in the field artillery—if I could only be assigned to a battery in the division."

"I can, of course, assign you in your present grade," the general replied, "but that would hardly be fair to you with your promotion papers in our hands. It would invalidate them at once, you understand?"

"Sir, Lieutenant Swift respectfully declines the infantry commission and requests assignment in his present rank to a battery," was the bomb shell that fell into these infantry headquarters from his lips in the next instant. The re-classified artilleryman was rigidly at attention and trying to appear impersonal and very military, but his whole appearance radiated eager expectancy.

No surprise showed in the general's eyes. He merely chewed his unlighted cigar re-reflectively a few moments, then turned to his chief of staff.

"Colonel, telephone the artillery brigade that I am sending Lieutenant Swift down for immediate assignment to a battery," he ordered quietly, and turned back to the papers on his desk.

Lieutenant Swift, his face beaming a new-found joy in life, stood at salute for nearly a minute until he saw that the general had no intention of noticing him further. He brought his hand back smartly to his side and went straight to the door on heels that seemed to have the lightness of wings. A few moments later, out in the star-lit night the headquarters staff heard an exuberant voice as of a soldier who must have partaken too freely of cognac since there could be no sane cause for such spontaneous joy in this black world of war tonight.

"Through the storm, through the night,
Up where the doughboys fight,
All our cais-sons go roll-ing along
At ze-ro hour, we'll be there,
Ans'ring every call and flare,
And our cais-sons go roll-ing along."

"Now what do you suppose has gotten into that poor fool? Shell shock?" inquired the astounded infantry chief of staff.

The general did not look up from his desk. His life had been spent in the infantry, but many times he had sensed that wild esprit of the roaring field artillery.

"Nothing as mild as that, Colonel," the division commander replied casually. "It's the field artil-ler-ee that's got into him. And when that virus once gets into the red blood of a man," he added more feelingly, "it's more potent than hashish—or all the drowsy drugs of mandragora."

Preceding events briefly retold

For three days Morgan and Pettigrew, partners in a pearling expedition, had awaited the arrival of their other partner, Donovan, in his boat the *Spindrift*. They had sailed in the *Anna* to pick up divers and here, southeast of Amanu, Donovan was to have joined them with the stores and a chart of the island Taukura. Donovan had stumbled upon this island accidentally, found it had never been pearled, and made a chart showing its location and approach among the Dangerous Isles of the Southern Pacific.

Growing impatient at Donovan's tardiness, and each secretly worried because of it, they put about and made for Wakatea, the port where Donovan took on stores, hoping to pick him up on the way. They find his boat scuttled but kept awash by a ledge on which it had drifted. Donovan is in the deckhouse, knifed, a gold earring in his fingers. The chart is gone.

Pettigrew admits to Morgan that while last at Wakatea he mentioned he was going pearling on Taukura with Donovan. He had babbled this information while in his cups. They both feel sure that the only ones capable of attacking Donovan and stealing the chart are Stewart and his partner Lamotte—the latter they remember wears earrings much like that found clutched in Donovan's hand.

They go to Wakatea and get fresh supplies. Here their suspicions of Stewart are further confirmed. They find he sailed immediately after Donovan did and that he knew Donovan had a chart of Taukura. They also learn that Stewart and Lamotte headed for Kikia where they were to meet the latter's sister who was to arrive on the *Tahiti* mail boat.

Morgan and Pettigrew sail with all haste to intercept Stewart. They arrive at Kikia and demand an explanation from Stewart but get no satisfaction. Lamotte, however, is plainly nervous and has a torn ear, which he claims to have received in a fight. With so little evidence they cannot drag Stewart and Lamotte into court, but plan to follow them.

If Stewart goes to Taukura it will show them the way—which they cannot find without Donovan's chart—and also prove that Stewart has the chart. Thus they hope to find the secret pearling ground at Taukura and Donovan's murderer at the same time.

Stewart, fearing this, has a native waylay Morgan and Pettigrew and keep them doped for two days after he, Lamotte, and Lamotte's sister, Valerie, have sailed.

Valerie is fresh from New York and knows nothing of Stewart nor of her brother's participation in any wrong doing.

AT DAWN on the eighth day out from Kikia they sighted Taukura. It lay right out of the beaten track, flung down haphazard into the Pacific, uninhabited, owned by no one in particular.

In the early morning it seemed a fairy isle. Above the rim of dazzling white beach, tall coconut palms swayed lightly in the breeze. Beyond the ring of surf which marked the protecting reef, the lagoon lay clear and placid as a mirror. The sun rose in a cloudless sky and began its slow march

Part Two

The Dangerous Isles

A Romance of the South Seas

By

BASIL CAREY

westward. There was no sign of any living thing save now and again a faint splash that marked the passage of a leaping fish.

Lamotte was excited. His restless hands worried everything he touched and his words came in a high, sharpened voice. Stewart said little but there was a glint in his eyes, the strange savage glitter of triumph. For an instant he wondered what Morgan was doing and smiled grimly at the thought of his baffled enemy—the next moment every thought of Morgan was swept from his mind. The pearl lust, the anxiety to begin the search, filled his mind to the exclusion of everything else. They decided to make a camp on shore for a few days, and Val found herself busy handing out stores. Like the others she was thrilled at the near prospect of treasure-seeking. She forgot to practise the coldness with which she had treated Stewart during the past two days, and danced about like an excited child, till Lamotte shook her playfully and vowed she was demoralizing the boys.

"You'll soon have had enough of the island," he told her. "It's very small, by the look of it."

The longboat was well laden with stores, canvas, ropes, a bucket, an iron-hooped net, a glass-bottomed box for looking into the water, and other tackle required by the divers. Stewart was giving instructions regarding the box.

"Suppose you break that you get all same beating all same Aleuto," he said to Kaoha, and the Kanaka protested volubly, till Val enquired laughingly what had happened to Aleuto. Stewart looked away, and Lamotte did not answer, but Kaoha flooded her with explanations before the others could stop him.

"Aleuto bad and Tuarti (Stewart) he get bamboo an' beat, beat, beat. By-an-by Aleuto he cry an' Tuarti he beat, an' Aleuto cry more an' Tuarti beat more, long time, long time. By-an-by Aleuto he die. Tuarti heap big man all same devil," ended Kaoha respectfully. He had a vivid memory of Aleuto, a broken, sodden heap that moaned and writhed on the stained sand.

Valerie lifted a perplexed face to Lamotte. He reassured her instantly, and Stewart turned at the sound.

"It was nothing," he said. "These natives are all liars, Miss Lamotte, as you will learn in time. Aleuto got a thrashing for theft, that's all. Discipline must be maintained, you know."

He swung over the side and dropped into the longboat, and Lamotte followed him. On deck, Val watched it bobbing toward the opening into the lagoon. The entrance was narrow and dangerous and she held her breath as the boat shot through at last and the boys bent to their oars across the calm water of the lagoon. She watched them as they unloaded the longboat and began to erect a rough shelter. Lamotte had told her that Stewart and some of the divers would sleep ashore. It would save time, he said. Again there leapt into Val's mind the uneasy idea that all this hurry must have some urgent necessity behind it. Every hour seemed of importance, every device that would save time was eagerly welcomed. It was something more than the natural impatience of the pearl-seeker. It was as if they were driven by some sinister force that pursued them. That man that Stewart had mentioned—what was his name? . . . Morgan. Was it Morgan that they feared? Was he too on his way to Taukura, pursuing them? Yet Stewart had said it was impossible to reach Taukura without a chart, and apparently there was only one in existence.

The boat was returning, with Stewart in the bows. She could see Lamotte still ashore, absorbed in directing the boys. Nearer and nearer came the boat till it touched the *Swallow* and Stewart stood up, steadying the boat against the schooner's side.

"Now, Miss Lamotte, if you're coming, now's your time. Yes, over there. Steady now, steady."

She looked down and saw his outstretched arms, waiting to catch her. For an instant she shrank, then laughed at herself. His voice cut across her hesitancy.

"Drop!" he said shortly, "and drop as lightly as you can. I'll catch you. Don't be afraid."

Obediently she dropped, and found herself caught surely in his arms. He put her down into the boat as carefully as though she were a fragile ornament. His manner seemed to say, "You needn't be afraid of me. I shall never forget myself as I did the other night. You're quite safe." He sat with his face turned away from her, and spoke only to give some order to the boys as they beat to their oars. She leaned over the side, trailing her fingers in the cool water, flinging the shining drops high in the air. Almost unconsciously she smiled at Stewart. Who could be angry for ever in this fairy world?

The roar of the surf grew louder, and Puka, the steerer, looked straight ahead for the opening. To Val, gazing across the sunlit sea, no thought of danger presented itself. Suddenly she saw Stewart leap up and her ears caught the sound of fierce oaths. There came a sickening lurch, a scream from Puka, and then the sea rose up to meet them. She was shot into the water headfirst with incredible force and she had a sensation of flying down through the water. She swam hard for a dozen strokes, with a confused idea of getting clear of the overturned boat, and rose to find that she had unwittingly dived under the reef. Panic-stricken by the inky blackness she dived again only to rise into the same impenetrable darkness. Her bleeding hands clutched wildly at the shelving ledges of rough coral. All sense of direction was lost, and the fear of suffocation gripped her. Tales of sharks, of devil-fish, and coral poisoning came crowding into her head. She tried to scream, but no sound came. Her heart was beating like a drum and the blood sang like a rushing wind in her ears. Centuries went by while she struggled for breath, her arms beating the water like flails. Light—light—if she could find the light.

Something cold seized her ankle and dragged her down. She struck out fiercely but still it held on. There came a swirl of green water. Up and up to the blessed air at last.

WHEN she opened her eyes she was lying in the boat, with Stewart, very pale, supporting her head on his knee. He had dived for her while the Kanakas righted the boat. Her clothes were in ribbons and she could feel the warm blood flowing freely. Stewart saw her open her eyes and bent over her.

"Lie still. You're all right."

She leaned back against him, trying to straighten out her mind, where the horror of the reef still held sway. If it had not been for Stewart she might have been dead —would have been dead, in fact. It was to him that she owed her life. She tried to say so, tried to thank him, and could only gasp out formless words. She was conscious of a feeling of utter weakness, and a tingling as if her whole body had been beaten with thin stinging rods. In a dream she felt the boat touch the shelving beach and heard Lamotte's voice raised in vociferous enquiry. She tried to reassure him, but the words died in her throat. Presently she felt herself lifted from the boat and was immediately aware that it was not Stewart who held her. For a long time she lay very still on the warm sand. Presently someone lifted her head. A stream of liquid fire found its way down her throat. She coughed and sat up.

Stewart was kneeling by her side, rubbing her hand between his own so hard that it hurt and she drew it away. Lamotte put his huge hand under her chin and turned her face to his.

"*Mon Dieu*, but I thought you were gone that time."

She was moved that he should feel so deeply, and raised a feeble hand to his face. He kissed her fingers and his hold tightened.

Stewart was speaking in tones of suppressed rage.

"It was Puka, the boat-steerer. The fool! He thinks he's almighty, and it makes him careless. Careless! Huh! I'll bet he'll be more careful when I've done with him."

He relapsed into angry silence.

"There are no bones broken," Lamotte was saying, "and you are not too badly raked by the coral. There is some stuff on board. You must rub it well into the skin. No, don't begin to think of coral poisoning. You'll be all right."

"Caught the blade of his oar on the coral," burst out Stewart. "Well, this is where he damn well gets off."

He rose to his feet and strode off to where the Kanakas were gathered. At his command the wretched boat-steerer crept forward and lay there whining, terrified at the look in his master's eyes. Stewart jerked him to his feet with an oath, and struck him across the mouth. Frantic with terror the Kanaka wrenched himself free and fled to Valerie for protection. He knelt on the sand at her feet begging her to intercede for him. He beat his breast, the tears streamed down his face, he was like a frightened child. Valerie caught the two words "Tuarti" and "kill" over and over again. Above him Stewart towered, relentless, determined.

"Let him get up," he said. "I'm going to punish him."

"You mean you're going to kill him the way you killed Aleuto," she said quietly. "Kaoha was right about that, after all?"

His eyes blazed.

"Yes. You're right. I did kill him. He deserved it. These natives—they're animals. They'd do us all in, if they could. We've got to keep the whip hand."

His jerked sentences betrayed the fury that consumed him.

"You let Puka alone," said Val. "He couldn't help the beastly boat upsetting. You've scared him stiff. He'll be careful next time. You let him go."

His hand fell heavily on Puka's shoulder and he dragged him up. Val staggered weakly to her feet and faced them.

"I was the one to get hurt," she said, "and it's for me to say. I say let him go."

Stewart's hand dropped. He looked at her, this slim girl in torn, blood-stained clothes that showed glimpses of her white body every time she moved.

"If I do," he said at last, "if I let him go, will it count as—as the *amende honorable?*"

"Yes," she said.

He flung Puka aside and sped him with a parting kick. Then he turned away and walked down to the water's edge without a word, a little smile playing about his lips.

NEXT day they started pearling.

Stowed away in the hold, the *Swallow* carried three native outrigger canoes. The Kanakas preferred to dive from these, owing to the support they gave when the divers rose to the surface exhausted. Through the glass-bottomed box—the *titea mata*—Stewart looked eagerly into the depths of the water. Bright colored fish, mostly red and blue, swam to and fro in ceaseless motion. Strange sea-plants shot their arms upwards, and among them went sneaking eels, long whips that cracked and vanished. Stewart shouted a warning to Kaoha, who was about to go down. These eels are vicious creatures. Kaoha grinned in reply and held up his knife, a sharp, short-handled weapon of destruction. Round his neck was slung a bag. This completed his equipment.

He paused and his face grew stern and full of purpose as he began to fill his lungs. He spent some minutes in inhaling and exhaling noisily, storing up air in his great chest. When his lungs were full he sank like a stone for twelve or fifteen feet, then turned head foremost and began to kick his way downwards through the still water. Stewart, watching through the *titea mata*, saw him grasp at a lump of coral near the ridge where they had marked the oysters. He wrenched shell after shell from the rock, cramming them into the bag that hung round his neck. At the end of two minutes he let go and shot to the surface. He flung his arms over the outrigger boom and gasped and struggled like a caught fish. When he opened his eyes they were bloodshot and troubled.

Stewart paid no attention to him. He took the bag and emptied its contents on the narrow floor of the canoe. He waited impatiently until Kaoha had recovered. Again the Kanaka dived, and yet again. And each time he rose Stewart took the bag from him with eager hands, till at length Kaoha protested.

"No more, Tuarti."

"Yes," said Stewart inflexibly. "You go one time two time more. Suppose bring up good pearl get bullamacow."

Heartened by the promise of corned beef, a favorite delicacy, Kaoha sank twice more. The last time he descended the shadow of a shark slid between him and the boat. He came to the surface in a panic and Stewart cursed him soundly. But threats were of no avail. He refused to go down again. They rowed ashore where Lamotte awaited them.

"Any luck?" queried Stewart.

"Twenty-nine shells and a couple of small pearls," Lamotte told him. "By the way, Rapuhi's gone."

"Rapuhi? He's one of the best divers we've got. How'd it happen?"

"The fool got his foot caught by one of the giant clams. Do you know the brute I mean? Lies around with its shell open and nabs anything that comes along. Once it gets you, you might as well try to get out of a safe. The poor devil started to hack his foot off with his pearl-knife, but he was drowned before he could finish."

"Rotten luck," Stewart grumbled. "Oh, well, there it is."

He took out his knife and began the evisceration of Kaoha's haul.

Not a single pearl rewarded him. He flung the last shell away and turned a flushed face to Lamotte.

"Damned sell, eh?"

"Wait," Lamotte soothed him. "We've struck a poor patch, that's all. Tomorrow we'll have better luck."

But Stewart sat sullen and unconsoled, furious at his failure. Most of the night he lay awake, seeing before his hot eyes visions that maddened him, visions of pearls, pearls, pearls, moon-white, shining, pearls.

On the schooner Lamotte slept heavily. Once he awoke and started up, listening. But no one was there and presently he lay down again.

CHAPTER VI

MORGAN opened heavy eyes.

He was lying flat on his back on the windy beach of Kikia, and five yards away was Pettigrew, propped fantastically against a palm tree, his mouth wide open, and one shoulder hunched higher than the other. In a fit of elfish irony Pereira had twisted a wreath of red jasmine flowers and set it on the tousled head. In spite of himself Morgan smiled. He lay still for some time while memory came filtering back. There had been a fight. Someone must have landed him one between the eyes, he supposed. That would account for the heaviness of his senses.

"Hullo," said Pettigrew unexpectedly.

Morgan started.

"Thought you hadn't waked yet."

Pettigrew sat up.

"I've been awake a long time. Say, what happened? Didn't go on the drink last night, did we?"

He stretched himself.

"My head's splittin'," he groaned. "Guess I must have been pretty well soaked. You ain't lookin' your own cheerful little self, neither."

"Do you remember chasing someone?" demanded Morgan. "Ah, there was a knife. You remember? Well, what came next?"

"I bashed someone," said Pettigrew promptly, "an' I hope it hurt him. Do you suppose we got knocked out? Hey, who's been tying up your shoulder for you?"

"Damned if I know," said Morgan. "Where's Tain and the boys?"

Pettigrew had discovered the jasmine wreath.

"Someone's havin' a game with us," he observed wrathfully. "Look at this! Dressin' me up like a cupid! Them perishin' girls, I s'pose. What the—"

But Morgan was staring at a little mark on his arm.

"Look here," he said." See this? That's a hypodermic, sure as you're born. Drugged. Yes, we've been drugged. That's what's making us feel queer. Who could—Stewart—"

Their eyes sought the sea. They saw no boat except the *Anna*, looking strangely lonely.

"Gone away. Can't be him, then."

A thought struck him.

"Was it last night? Seems to me, seems to me—"

"What's been happenin'? Where've we been, then? If it wasn't Stewart, I'll bet he's behind it all."

Morgan caught him up.

"Of course he is. And why? Because he's afraid of us. If we wanted proof that he stole that chart off Donovan we've got it now. He's slung his hook, and he was afraid we'd follow him. That's why we've been put to sleep."

Pettigrew got up, staggering a little. He shaded his eyes with his hands and looked out to sea. Morgan started along the beach toward the village and the older man stumbled after him. They had not gone twenty yards before Tain came flying to meet them.

"Moriani, where you go one, two day? Tain look, look, all time. You go drunk, eh?"

"Two days," said Morgan. "Hear that? It's two days. Tain," he added abruptly, "you get longboat."

"What for?" interposed Pettigrew. "Don't be such a damn fool. We can't catch up to Stewart. An' we can't get to Taukura without a chart. What's the game, anyway?"

"We're going to have a try," said Morgan grimly. "Taukura's all up of course. But see here, the *Swallow's* got to come back with the loot. Now to my mind she won't come far. If I know anything about Stewart, he'll take those pearls to Paviete, to Chang. If we can lie around, maybe we'll spot him."

Pettigrew shook his head, and looked dubious.

"It's risky," he argued. "And anyway we can't go through the Dangerous Isles without the chart."

"We'll go round 'em then, and chance it," said Morgan impatiently. "You needn't tell me it's risky. I know that. But I tell you this. If you think I'm going to let Stewart, or any man alive, get over me—well, you're dead wrong, that's all."

They walked on in silence till they reached Jake's place. The slant-eyed storekeeper looked at them mockingly, or so it seemed to Morgan. He gave his order and banged down the money with unnecessary violence. Pettigrew ordered rum and drank it greedily.

"Who's done the dirty on us this time? Someone beyond Stewart must have been in it. We've been somewhere these last two days. Now, where?"

For a long time he puzzled over it, his brows wrinkled in thought. At last he put down his glass with such emphasis that a splash of rum shot over the edge.

"What a fool! Pereira, for a cert."

"Might have been. Oh, what does it matter? I don't care a curse who it was. It's Stewart at the back of everything. Say it was Pereira, if you like. I daresay it was. We can't prove it. Anyway I'm not wasting time on Pereira. Time enough when we get back. I'll bet Stewart's depending on our having a scrap, and one of us getting knocked out. Most likely Pereira's putting on the knuckle-dusters and waiting for us this moment. Well, he'll have to wait till I'm through with Stewart. How much more are you going to drink? You drink like a fish. Come on."

He took Pettigrew impatiently by the arm and they went down to the water's edge, where Tain awaited them.

BY MID-DAY they were well away. The hot sun beat down mercilessly and the deck was warm under their bare feet. Morgan went about like a man in a dream, and Pettigrew sat morosely at the tiller and talked under his breath. Twice he called to Morgan and received no answer. His eye travelled anxiously over the broad shoulders and straight lithe body of his friend. If there was a scrap, and there certainly would be, Morgan could put up a good show, he decided. But they would never find the *Swallow*. Even if they reached Paviete and lay by for her, she would most likely give them the slip. It was a fool's errand, a wild-goose chase. Yet Morgan would not listen to reason. He shifted his quid to the other side of his mouth and bit on it thoughtfully. Presently he perceived that Morgan was busy with an oiled rag. The sight startled him.

"Cleanin' your gun, eh? Say, just what do you suppose is going to happen?"

"Don't know," retorted Morgan, viciously. "But I've a fair notion. Anyway, I'm ready. If we can only get there in time!"

"If the wind holds, we ought to be all right," said Pettigrew "And look here. We're carryin' too much canvas. It's risky. The *Anna's* too light. If we're not careful she'll heel too far. Last time I put her about she nearly dipped her sails."

But Morgan refused to take in a stitch. The chase was hot, and his blood with it. The swaying ship, that cantered so gallantly through the blue meadows of the sea, would not fail him till he had laid his quarry by the heels. One thought possessed his mind, one word rang in his ears like a call to arms —Stewart! How many times had they crossed swords? There had been that affair of rum-running in the Paumotas. Stewart bore him a grudge for that, and a worse grudge on account of that little business of the Taiputi natives. Then there was the Tahiti affair, which ended so disastrously for Maitland and almost, but for luck, for Morgan as well. Grimly he reckoned up the scores, and thirsted for the settlement that was surely coming. In his gray eyes the fires of battle were alight. For a long time he sat there, dreaming, heedless of Pettigrew's jerky remarks, till at last a well-directed kick roused him.

"Wind's droppin'," said Pettigrew.

Morgan sprang to his feet. It was true, in spite of his curses. By nightfall the sails hung limp and useless. The stars came out in the velvet sky, and the moon rose out of the sea. Morgan paced up and down like a leopard, and Pettigrew sighed as he watched him. What was going to be the end of it all? Ever and again he wet his finger and held it up anxiously. But there was no feel of wind in the still air, no promise of a breeze at dawn.

"Can't you stand still?" he demanded irritably, "instead of prowlin' up an' down like a bleedin' bear? That's not goin' to raise the wind. We'll lie here all tomorrow, I'll bet. . . . . I remember once, me and Donovan was after *bêche-de-mer*—yes, we run a rare lot of cargoes in our time—well, we got into a calm just south of Amanu, and Donovan he started ravin' just like you. Well, we were carryin' a Mormon missionary, a white-faced fellow with eyes like coals, and longish black hair, an' he came up to Donovan and started arguin' with him. Me, I just lay back and grinned 'cos I knew what good it was arguin' with Donovan. 'If it's wind you're-wantin', pray for it,' says the Mormon, and Donovan handed out some shockin' language. By and by he quieted down and offered the missionary a game at poker, only meanin' to aggravate the little rat. But blow me if the little rat didn't take him on. 'Cards is sinful,' he says, 'but the ways of God's glory are strange. I'll play you, Mr. Donovan, and the stakes—the stakes,' says he, 'is prayer. If I win,' he says, 'you'll promise me to go down on your knees and offer a prayer for wind.' Donovan was taken aback, as you might say, but he agreed. He was a mighty good player and the Mormon was flush, as we knew, having seen his roll when he didn't know we were lookin'.

"Well, I fetched the cards and they started in to play. Every time the missionary put down a card he'd roll his eyes up and his lips would move, till I thought I'd burst, he looked so like a dying hen. Prayin', ye see, for the right card. By and by I could see he looked like winning, and Donovan was gettin' all hot and bothered. And still that little black-haired shrimp went on handin' out the cards. An' when it was over, Donovan smacked down the pack and jumped up. The Mormon had won, and his greasy face was like the risin' sun. He regular bullied Donovan. 'Come on deck,' he shouts, and Donovan follows him up the companion as meek as a pup. 'Kneel down,' he roars out, 'and get to it.' Well, Donovan plumped down on his knees, and started. Not bein' well acquainted with God, he didn't begin very well, and by and by he got stuck. What does the Mormon do but kneel down beside him and encourage him. 'Oh, Lord, Thou knowest,' he begins, and by and by Donovan caught the trick and went at it hammer and tongs, thee-ing and thou-ing most remarkable.

"There was the two of them, roarin' and bellowin' fit to burst, and near half an hour they went on, first one burstin' out and then the other, and me and all the boys bettin' on who would hold out longest. And then I noticed something, and I shouted out 'We're moving!' And so we were. There was a breeze starting in to blow from the northeast and pretty soon we were spankin' along at seven knots. Donovan and the Mormon rose up, sweatin' streams, and did a kind of hornpipe to each other. 'You played damn well,' says Donovan. 'I ought to,' yells the little man, 'I was Slick Sam of the Bowery before I got converted. Praise the Lord!' "

Morgan nodded.

"And you want me to shout a few prayers? Is that it?"

Pettigrew was genuinely shocked.

"Hell, no! Don't you get religion whatever you do."

The silence of the night fell on them again, broken only by the distant droning voices of the boys.

FOR four days the *Swallow* lay off Taukura, and Stewart's face grew haggard with failure. After hours of arduous heart-breaking toil the result was five small pearls of inconsiderable value. Stewart and Lamotte, nerves on edge, quarrelled violently about them, while Val, terrified, sat with clasped hands, watching. The storm died away at last into sullen mutterings. Stewart, still white with passion, flung himself on the deck. The incident was slight, but it opened Val's eyes to the fact that Stewart was master. His attitude to her during the last three days had been one of studied indifference. He knew she was piqued, and rejoiced at it, aware that nothing taunts a woman as much as neglect. Truth to tell, Val was much intrigued. She had expected him to be penitent, shamed, pleading for forgiveness. Instead of that, behold him callous, and apparently forgetful of the enormity of his offence. It made her feel just a little foolish to put on a dignified and distant air toward a man who didn't care two pins whether she looked at him or not.

On the fifth morning Stewart said suddenly, "Two days more and we quit. We've pretty well combed the lagoon as it is. Our luck's out this time."

"I knew it," said Lamotte. "Did I not say from the beginning that it would be like this?"

"Why?" asked Val. What made you think so? We didn't start on a Friday, did we? Well, I shan't be sorry when we go. It's frightfully hot, and you two do nothing but quarrel. Paul's as pale and irritable as he can be. Oh, yes, you are. You look as if you've got something on your mind, almost as if you're expecting someone to come after you. Disappointment's getting on your nerves, that's what it is."

Lamotte got up heavily and slouched away. A silence fell on the two that were left. Presently Val said with an effort, "Where are you—where are the boys diving to-day?"

"The north side. There's a ledge there that we haven't touched. If that fails us—"

He ended with a shrug. Then he said in a different tone, "There's something I want to say."

"Yes?"

"I thought we'd agreed to be friends."

"We are friends," she countered.

"Nonsense! You've treated me very coldly ever since I lost my temper with Puka. If I distressed you—I'm sorry."

Val held out a friendly hand.

"That's over," she told him.

He took her hand, but he did not shake it. With a swift movement he bent his head and she felt his hot lips on her wrist.

"Please don't," said Val.

He looked into her eyes.

"Why not? I love you. Don't start away like that. I loved you the first day I saw you, when Paul brought you across the beach at Kikia. You looked such a little happy thing."

She was trembling.

"You're asleep," he said, "and I want to waken you. Don't tremble so, sweetheart."

He was holding her lightly, gently, as a man holds a fluttering bird. The magic that lay in his caressing hands was casting its spell about her. The longing in his voice was unmistakable. His words poured over her like a sweet warm flood that surged higher and higher till it seemed she must be engulfed. She was shaken, shocked into reality by the fact that here was a man who desired her. How many times had she heard love discussed in smoky studios? Yet, for all their frankness and amazing knowledge of detail, what did those thin-blooded men and short-haired women know about love? On and on went the low passionate voice.

"I love you so. You're the world to me. Up till now women have meant so little. I need you. I'm lonely . . . . I'm not asking you to love me, I'm only begging you to let me go on loving you."

The sight of this masterful man pleading so humbly set Val's head in a whirl. A new and overwhelming feeling of power seized her. With it came another emotion, something unexplained, that made her feel shy and rather frightened. A flash of memory showed her that night when Stewart held her in his arms and when, for one blinding moment, something in her had answered his passion. What was it? What was it?

She drew back and he let her go, marking how her cheeks flushed and paled and flushed again. He saw the uncertainty, the bewilderment in her face, and judged that he had said enough for the present. Lamotte's voice was heard, calling him, and he left her without a word.

"She's in love with Love," he said to himself. "Soon she'll be in love with the lover."

HE SWUNG over the side and they set off for the day's pearling. They meant to work the north side of the lagoon as a last chance. When they reached the still water the boys pulled round to the other side of the island. The coral formation there was slightly different, growing in clumps reminiscent of folded tulip flowers, and Kaoha had reported it as a likely place. They scanned the sea-floor anxiously, impatient at the myriad-coloured fishes and curious plants that obscured the view. Kaoha slid over the side and prepared to descend. When his lungs were full he sank and fought his way to the bottom. In one hand he carried a piece of flat wood, slightly hollowed, and with this he pulled himself downward at great speed. He stayed down for nearly three minutes until Stewart became alarmed. To his relief a wet head appeared six yards to the right and Kaoha flung himself on the outrigger, and lay there for some time, his breath returning in noisy whoops. Blood was coming from his nose and ears and his great chest heaved violently.

"Suppose Puka come, more quick," he suggested at last.

Stewart signalled to Lamotte and presently Puka swam to them, carrying his knife between his teeth.

"Go down," said Stewart laconically, and for the rest of the morning the two Kanakas dived again and gain. It was as Kaoha had said. There were many oysters in the hidden ridges, and many of them were large. By mid-day the catamaran was laden with shells and Stewart gave the signal to stop. Lamotte, a hundred yards off, followed his example, and they all returned to the shore.

"Kaoha looks about finished," commented Lamotte, after a keen glance at the flagging brown body. "How many times has he been down?"

"Damned if I know," returned Stewart indifferently. "These Tahiti boys are good divers, but they've not got the stamina you would expect. He'll be all right. How'd you get on?"

"Fairish."

Puka was piling up the harvest under a tree, and the two white men sank into the shade with relief. The sun was high in the brazen heavens, and the hours on the lagoon had tried them sorely. After a while Stewart sat up and reached out his hand toward the pile. With his knife he forced apart the edges of the bivalve and examined carefully the fleshy interior. There was nothing and he flung the shell aside. Lamotte roused himself and in silence they worked, while the inquisitive Kanakas watched in unwonted silence. The minutes passed by on leaden feet, dogged by disappointment.

"Something here," said Lamotte suddenly. He probed again and then held something aloft in triumph. It was a fair-sized pearl, of good lustre.

"Our luck's in again," said Stewart.

They worked on steadily, and by the end of half an hour it seemed as if his words were true. Fifteen pearls of varying sizes lay in the little velvet-lined box between Stewart's knees. Both men were sweating with excitement.

Lamotte tossed his black hair back from his forehead and heaved a sigh of satisfaction. The knife in his hand fell idle. But Stewart went on. His fingers bled from contact with the sharp edges of the shells. His heart beat almost to suffocation. Lamotte shouted to Puka to fetch a drink. As he turned his head there came a smothered exclamation.

"God!" said Stewart, in a choked voice.

It was the pearl of his dreams.

It lay in his trembling hand, and the watchers came crowding near to worship it. They spoke in awed whispers of its perfect shape and incomparable lustre. They praised its whiteness, in soft liquid words. Lamotte burst into a flood of excited adulation. But Stewart said not a word. He sat motionless, unaware of the confused noises about him. All his life he had reamed of this moment. He looked down at the shining thing, the little shining thing that was for him the epitome of loveliness. In his hand he held all the romance and beauty in the world. He lifted his head and looked away, past the wind-blown palms, with eyes that saw nothing.

Methodically Lamotte examined the rest of the bivalves. No more pearls rewarded his search. At last he touched Stewart gently on the arm, and Stewart turned to him the blank face of a sleep walker.

"Well, you don't intend to sit here all day, I suppose. Tiffin's ready, if you are," said Lamotte.

They ate and drank, and Lamotte kept up a running fire of small talk to which the other responded in monosyllables. When it was time to return to the *Swallow* they packed the pearls carefully and Lamotte bade the boys carry the bags of pearl-shell down to the water's edge. This stuff would sell at a high price in Tahiti where there was a good market.

"We'll sail to-morrow, eh?" said Lamotte, as they shot across the lagoon toward the schooner.

"To-night. Why wait for to-morrow? The wind's right and we may as well go while the going's good."

VAL was waiting for them, and Stewart's heart leaped with sudden longing. She was so slim, so desirable, and in her eyes was a new look, a look that his kisses had wakened. She watched them gravely and when Lamotte shouted that they had had good luck at last she smiled. When the men got on board she clamored eagerly for details and gasped her admiration when they opened the little box and she peeped in.

"But there aren't very many."

"Do you know," said Stewart impressively, "that sometimes pearlers don't get a single pearl in weeks? It's only because this island hasn't been touched for years that we've done well. We've had stupendous luck—luck that mayn't come again in our lives. You see, years ago, when pearls were as plentiful as mud, the pearlers grabbed all they could and never bothered to throw the spawn back into the sea. Consequently after thirty or thirty-five years there's a dearth. Pearls don't grow in a night. It takes seven, eight, ten years for them to mature."

"Where are you going to keep them?"

"In here."

Stewart touched his belt. It was curiously made of leather and steel, with little cartridge-like divisions. He showed her how the pearls, wrapped in cotton wool, could be slipped into safety. He took it off and spread it on the table so that she might examine it.

"A man in Toledo made it, years ago. No, he didn't make it for me. I—er acquired it. These compartments are very strong. There is a thin lining here of steel. And it fastens, so, a double clasp, you see. There, they'll lie there safe enough till we hit Kikia."

▸ They turned the *Swallow's* head northwards again, and were well away before sundown. All promised well, and Stewart's heart sang. But Lamotte, snatching an hour's rest before his trick at the wheel, moaned in his sleep. What did he fear? Of what was he dreaming? Did he see the *Anna* scudding south under a stiff breeze at last?

CHAPTER VII

MORGAN flung on every inch of canvas that the *Anna* could carry and paid no attention to Pettigrew's expostulations. He was like a man urged onward by some grim foreknowledge of fate. The calm that lasted for a night and a day flung him into a frenzied impatience that alarmed Pettigrew and set the Kanakas whispering. When at last the calm broke and the blessed wind came creeping lazily down from the north east, he was like a man reprieved from death. The one thought that had possessed him during twenty-four hours of forced inaction was the thought that Stewart would escape him. They pushed southward, ploughing through the shining sea till they came to the Dangerous Isles. Here they paused while Morgan and Pettigrew thrashed out a quarrel.

"It'll save a couple of days if we chance the passage."

"We ain't got no chart of the passage. You're a fool, my boy, that's what you are. Just to save a few hours you're ready to risk our necks showin' how clever you are. That's what it comes to. Oh, yes, it does. You know blamed well you'll have a hell of a time nosin' out the channel through the islands. It can't be done. We'll go round.

Suppose it is a couple of days more? It can't be helped."

They argued for the best part of an hour until Morgan consented to see reason. But he fumed mightily as they skirted the group, and made a long tack to the south west. The wind held and the dim islands to port slid by in a blue haze. They were heading for Paviete, calculating that Stewart would take his gains to the first available market.

"Supposin' Stewart does get anything worth selling, he'll take 'em to Chang," Pettigrew surmised. "Specially as Paviete's fairly near. And he'll want to get rid of 'em as soon as he can. He knows we'll be on his track."

So they swung round to the south of Paviete, to the broad road where Stewart must pass if he made for the island. Yet it was on the cards that the *Swallow* might slip by without coming in sight. For two days they waited, cruising about, searching in vain for a sight of the enemy. The only boat that passed was a tramp rolling up to Tahiti with a cargo of cheap goods from Auckland. She had been blown clean out of her reckoning by a heavy gale, and her battered bows bore evidence of the weather she had encountered. Morgan watched morosely as her hull disappeared. His spirit chafed at the forced inaction. The suspense was tearing at his nerves. "Stewart—Rat Stewart, robber, killer of a man, where are you?"

"Do you reckon we'd better lie a bit closer in?" said Pettigrew.

"Why?"

"Seems to me we've got a mighty poor chance of gettin' the *Swallow* as far out as this. She'd slip by easy enough, and we'd never so much as get a sight of her."

"We can't lie any closer. Chang's spies are all over the place. They'd have us spotted before you could say knife. I know we're taking a long chance. Wait another day, and then we'll look for him in Paviete."

They left it at that, and for another day they waited.

THE hot hours dragged by, and both men began to show the strain of suspense. The same fear showed in the eyes of each, and at last Morgan said abruptly, "We've missed them."

Yet they waited doggedly, loth to seek Paviete, that nest of yellow thieves. Tales were whispered, grim tales baldly told by unimaginative traders, and wise men gave the islands a wide berth. Now and then a missionary, pluckier than his fellows, effected a landing. Departure, however, followed inevitably and hurriedly. But the ubiquitous Mormons were persistent, undaunted by any number of failures.

"Folks wouldn't believe how many Mormons there is in these parts," said Pettigrew, as they discussed the matter. "There's crowds of 'em. You wouldn't think their way of lookin' at religion would catch the natives' fancy, but they just mop it up. But there ain't much religion on Paviete. It's an unhealthy place for the padres. Terrible lot of accidents happen there, I'm told. Chang says his prayers to a Buddha made of white jade. The natives, well, they're queer. They've got a shark-*tapu*. They reckon the shark is kind of a holy animal and mustn't be spoken to roughly. Consequently the sharks round Paviete are doin' very well, thank you. I forget what they do to a man who kills a shark. Something very juicy it is. Oh, very juicy. There's burnin' in it, and beating, and cutting—well, it makes the Inquisition seem a bit timid and playful, if you know what I mean. Ay, it's a queer place, Paviete."

"Queerer than 'Easter'?" said Morgan idly.

"No," returned Pettigrew solemnly, "there's nothing in this world can touch Easter Island for queerness. I tell you, it gave me the creeps. I was there once, when I was a youngster, but I always fought shy of its afterwards. Don't know why, but it made me come hot and funny all over to see the figures all carved out of stone, and the walls that end in the sea, and all the rest of it. It all seemed so unnatural, somehow."

But Morgan was not listening. Pettigrew talked on, telling some old tale of his wild youth, and the other man bent his eyes to the south, his whole being concentrated on the desire for the sight of a sail. The spray dashed over his hands as the *Anna* dipped and rose, and once it caught his eyes. He shook his head impatiently, and as he did so there came a shout from Tain, up aloft. Over the rim of the sea came the *Swallow*, hurrying up from the south toward Paviete. Morgan gave a shout that brought Pettigrew to his side.

"She's a good way off."

Morgan snatched the glasses from him and looked again.

"I've seen her too often not to know the build of her. See the course she's making? Look here, this is what we must do."

He outlined his plan with feverish haste and Pettigrew nodded.

THE *Swallow* was beating steadily northward, and Stewart rubbed his hands. If they could make Paviete without running across the *Anna*, well and good. Chang would pay a fairish price on those pearls. He would ask just twice as much as he hoped to get and Chang would offer just half as much as he felt inclined to give. They would argue and wrangle for the best part of a day before the bargain was made. Stewart frowned to think of Chang's yellow fingers holding the precious things. Yet, the pearl of pearls should remain with him. He would not show it to Chang, would not hint of its existence. Lamotte would not know. He would not be there at the bargaining. Anyhow, Lamotte could be squared or bullied into acquiescence.

And Valerie?

He smiled as he thought of Valerie. The fire he had lit in her was burning to his satisfaction. These strange new thoughts that he had roused in her, where would they lead? He watched her covertly and marked the doubt in her eyes. Her nearness made him impatient. There was something different, some quality of aloofness in her, that attracted him more than he cared to own. A hundred times a day his desire for her laid hands upon him and urged him forward. After Paviete, he promised himself, after Paviete.

It was night.

Lamotte was at the wheel and the other two in the cabin.

"Show me the pearls again," she begged.

She watched, fascinated, as he loosened the clasps and took the belt from the place where it lay so snugly against his body. Soon the pearls lay shimmering in the light of the swinging lamp. Her soft fingers caressed them delicately, lifting them, weighing them, while in her eyes awoke wonder at their surpassing loveliness.

"Queer they should come out of a thing like an oyster," mused Stewart. "A bit of sand or something gets inside, you know, and the oyster spins a kind of silky stuff over it. Clever, of course, only not what you'd expect. Somehow one doesn't associate brains with oysters. Instinct, I suppose."

"I knew a man in New York who used to write sonnets on pearls," said Valerie. "He had a snub nose and wavy hair and his name was Benjamin Turtle. Yes, it was. I thought names like that only existed in the telephone directory until I met him. I can see him now, with one hand on his hip, reciting yards and yards of poetry, and all the others just bored to death. He was just getting mixed up in a divorce case when I saw him last."

"You liked him?"

"I loathed him. He wasn't a man at all. He was a—a kind of puppet that any fool could set jigging. He pretended to be sensitive, but he'd no feelings at all, really. If anyone had pricked him, I'm sure he'd have bled sawdust. And it wouldn't have been real honest-to-goodness sawdust. It would be a special highly cultured brand with a delicate perfume of its own. That's the kind of man he was."

"I see. Shall we forget him?"

She flushed at the half-insolent inflection in his voice. Why was he looking at her so intently with those curious eyes of his? His thin lips were parted and his breath came short and uneven. One hand slid across to her wrist and she felt his fingers tremble as he touched her. Slowly he carried her hand to his lips. His eyes held hers, challenging her.

"You are learning to care for me a little."

It was not a question. It was an assertion. She did not deny it. She could not. This man intrigued her, fascinated her. Already the days before she had known him seemed blank and empty. Deep in her heart lay buried the old feeling of distrust, of uneasiness. She stifled it, but it remained, hidden there, waiting its chance to spring up again at some word or look that should betray the real Stewart. He knew it, knew how slight was the thread by which he held her, and the very uncertainty of his mastery tempted him to try his strength.

"I love you so," he said. The insolence had gone out of his voice. He leant toward her and took her other hand in his. Nearer and nearer he drew her. Could she have read his eyes she would have seen there only desire—desire for her beauty and her untouched womanhood—desire so ruthless that it would trample on her soul to reach its end.

His hands slipped to her shoulders. His slow voice began to weave its spell. She stood there, the quarry at the mouth of the snare, not quite sure, not quite willing.

As she hesitated, destiny crashed about them.

There came a warning cry. A shot rang out. Someone screamed, a scream that ended in a little cough. Above them came the thud of a body falling heavily. Stewart sprang to the companion.

"Gather up those pearls!" he shouted and was gone, pulling at his gun as he ran.

LIKE a ghost ship the *Anna* loomed out of the darkness. No glimmer of light showed on her and she had crept close before the lookout espied her. Morgan's plan had been to get aboard before the alarm was given. But Kaoha's eyes were too sharp. He saw the *Anna's* longboat slide through the waves and he shouted as it drew alongside. Even as he called out, Morgan scaled the side of the *Swallow* and swung himself on board. After him came seven Kanakas with stealthy feet and gleaming eyes like great cats on the prowl. A bullet sang, and one of them fell. It was Lamotte who fired. Morgan's gun spat out a retort, and the two forces joined battle. Back and forth they raged, the Kanakas with shouts and cries, the white men in grim silence. Footsteps thudded hastily. Through an open hatch a drift of light showed figures that leapt and fell. Lamotte snatched at a brown body and lifted it high above his head. He hurled it to the deck with a sickening crash. It lay there, screaming. He lifted it again . . . and again . . . till the cries ceased and the pulped flesh sagged under his hands. All around him was confusion. A bullet whipped by his ear and buried itself in the deck-house. Where was Stewart? He wiped his hands and felt for his gun again.

Morgan, battering his way astern, fought furiously. High above, the starboard light winked its green eye mockingly. He was using his knife now, too close for shooting. A form loomed before him. He struck, and the body slid to its knees and lay moaning on the boards. He wrenched at the knife and struggled forward. The wind was getting up Its thin whistle sounded through the cordage like the shrill cry of a fife. Someone leapt from the forescuttle and flung himself into the mass of struggling figures. It was Makui the Tahitian cook, with a long curved knife in his hand. A sharp cry sounded close by, and a Kanaka rolled past Morgan's feet till he crashed into a stanchion. He clung to it, sobbing. The open hatch was slammed down and the darkness became more intense. Lamotte shouted, and Stewart's voice replied. Morgan struck out in the direction of the sound. But between him and his enemy there bulked a wall of solid flesh. Tain was beside him, fighting hard, grunting with satisfaction when his blows got home.

No one marked Pettigrew as he climbed aboard. He dropped quickly and lay flat. Presently he began to wriggle on his belly through the darkness, avoiding the swaying bodies that lurched across his path. One fell across him and cautiously he shifted its weight till it lay flat on him from shoulder to heel, a shield from stray bullets. Under this burden he crept forward again, oblivious of the swirling mass of fighters, his eyes piercing the darkness toward his objective. Inch by inch he drew near the companion. Danger lay there, for a light shone up from the cabin below. If Stewart were watching . . . Pettigrew gritted his teeth and nerved himself to the effort. Protected by the body of the Kanaka he gained the head of the companion. He dragged the brown arms under his chest and knotted them after an immense struggle. A sudden lurch of the ship and he and the Kanaka coasted head first down the companion.

"Hell!" said Pettigrew.

He sat up and shook himself free. The Kanaka's skull was smashed by the violence of the impact. A foot showed on the companion and Pettigrew flattened himself against the shadowed wall. Apparently satisfied that there was no one but a lifeless native at the bottom of the steps, the man above withdrew. Pettigrew breathed again and plunged forward into the light of the cabin.

For a moment he stood blinking in the glare of the swinging lamp. As his dazed eyes grew accustomed to the change, he became aware that he was not alone. Crouching in a corner, her eyes narrowed, her face dead white, was a girl with a gun in her hand. Pettigrew recoiled at sight of the weapon.

"Put that down," he said in a hoarse whisper. "The damn thing'll go off if you aren't careful."

For answer she pressed the trigger and Pettigrew ducked wildly. A bullet buried itself in the woodwork behind him. He shuddered.

"You little fool," he said, edging toward her. "What are you playin' at? Gimme that."

His hand shot out and grasped her wrist, twisting it until she cried out and loosened her hold. The gun dropped to the floor. He picked it up.

"Women ought never to be trusted with firearms," he said disgustedly. "Monkeyin' about with things they don't understand! Now see here. I don't want to hurt you, but I'm here to get something. So keep still."

His voice altered on the last two words, and she knew that she had to deal with a man who would stop at nothing.

"Where are those pearls?"

She shook her head. Her breath came quickly and her eyes were like stars. She was angry, furious with this man who had wrested the gun from her hands and shown her how weak a woman can be. What was happening overhead? Paul—where was he? Oh she would shout and surely they would hear her voice above the noise of battle.

"If you shout, they won't hear you," said Pettigrew, guessing her thought. "If they do, and one of 'em comes down here, I'll shoot him. Understand?"

She did understand. She had a vision of Stewart in the doorway throwing up his arms. This man would get his shot in first, and Stewart would fall.

"Where are the pearls?"

He was moving cautiously about the cabin. In his hand was the gun and whichever way he turned it pointed at her, as a magnet turns to the pole. He opened a chest and heaved the things out, turning them over with his bare feet. He passed his hand over the walls, feeling for a spring or a sliding panel. She watched him breathlessly. He was not young, but the strength of a gorilla was in those hairy arms where the blood of the dead Kanaka lay so crimson. She moved, and instantly his eyes were upon her; the gun shifted threateningly.

"Keep still," he said.

HE LOOKED at her, and his eyes fell to her waist and stayed there, caught by the sight of a heavy belt. A man's belt. She saw him staring at it, and the color left her face. She knew then what panic was. Fierce unreasoning terror swept over her. Unconsciously her hands stole to her waist.

"That belt . . . " he said.

The truth flashed on him. She had the pearls—this slip of a woman with great gray eyes. An easy thing, surely, to master her, and wrench that belt from its moorings! Yet, would it be so simple? He thrust the gun into his belt and advanced on her slowly, his great arms outstretched. She reminded him of a panther he had seen once in Bangkok, a velvet beast, brought in from the hills, with eyes that glanced from side to side, seeking escape. Her eyes were like that. Somehow they made him uneasy.

"Give me that belt."

She laughed at him. The moment of fear had passed. She was caught up by a passion of anger that defied the universe. They faced each other furiously. Pettigrew's blood was up. As two warring tigers draw back to spring, so they eyed each other, judging the moment for action. Pettigrew sprang, and the girl twisted under his arms. In a flash he was after her. But she was lithe as a cat, and his great arms closed on air. Round the cabin they went, Pettigrew breathless, infuriated, Valerie with the light of battle in her eyes. Her one idea was escape. But he knew it, and headed her off from the companion way every time. In the dim light the struggle raged. Once he almost caught her, but she slid by and left him fuming. Overhead the confused noises were growing louder, more menacing. The ship rocked with battle.

Suddenly and without warning, Valerie sprang for the light. There was hope of escape in the darkness. Quick as thought she swung herself on to the table that was built round the foot of the mainmast. She clutched wildly at the swinging lamp and put it out. Too late Pettigrew made a dive at her where she stood on the table. He came in violent contact with the mast and felt his nose begin to bleed. Staggering back, he grabbed at something soft. It was a coat of Stewart's. Still holding it, he began warily to feel his way. Hunter and hunted listened to each other's breathing in the darkness. In the sudden silence the tumult on deck rang out with increased clamor. Pettigrew, with hands outstretched, groped his way around the walls in the direction of the companion way. He reached it and stood motionless, trying to hush the sound of his breath. Dimly he began to make out bulky objects. Looking up, he could see the stars. Cautiously he put out one foot. It touched the body of the dead Kanaka, and Pettigrew drew back, assured now of his bearings. He crouched, ready to spring.

Suddenly Valerie shot by him with the scared swiftness of a deer. At the foot of the steps she stumbled over the Kanaka. A little cry of terror broke from her as her heels sank into the soft flesh. Pettigrew leapt after her. This time his arms closed round her. He snorted triumphantly.

It seemed, however, that he had caught not a woman but a wild cat, that fought and bit and struggled with amazing strength. By sheer force he overmastered her, his great hands bruising her body till she screamed. A sudden jerk brought them both to the ground. Pettigrew's outstretched hand felt something soft. It was the coat of Stewart's that had fallen to the ground. He whipped it over the girl's head, stifling her cries. Yet, try as he would, he could not wrench off the belt where the precious pearls lay. Moreover, it was extremely risky to loosen his hold in order to try.

Above the din of battle a whistle rang out. It was Morgan's signal. It meant: make haste. Make haste! Pettigrew set his jaw. He gripped Valerie as tightly as he could, and drew back for a rush. Up the companion he went stumbling, swearing, till he felt the wind on his face. His quick eyes peered from side to side, sought a path. Clutching his burden in a vice-like grip, he put his head down and ran. He heard a shout and Lamotte's voice, "Look out!" They had seen him. They were after him. A hand tore his shirt as he dashed by. His heart pumped violently and his lungs felt near to bursting with the strain. Cannon balls seemed to weigh down his feet. At last he gained the ship's side, and sprang.

The shock of the cold water swung things into proportion again. He was conscious of an immense sensation of triumph. With one arm he held Valerie, with the other he struck out for the *Swallow's* stern, where the longboat lay hidden.

"Keep still or you'll drown," he admonished Valerie. A shape shot out from the stern and brown hands pulled him and his burden out of the water.

"Tell Moriani come quick," he panted. He had no breath left to signal himself. Over the water floated the cry, "Moriani, Moriani! Come quick! Come quick, Moriani!" In less than a minute there came a splash in the darkness. Dimly they could see Morgan's arms cutting through the water. Behind him came the surviving boys. One by one they piled in and fell to the oars for dear life.

The *Anna* loomed high above them, her masts dark against the stars. As they drew alongside, Morgan became aware that Pettigrew was engaged in a violent struggle.

"What's up? What have you got there?"

"It's a young woman," explained Pettigrew.

CHAPTER VIII

"A—*WHAT?*"

"Didn't you hear?" demanded Pettigrew explosively. "Keep still, you little vixen, or I'll strangle you. Give me a hand, Morgan. Look out, man, look out. Hold tight. Oh, go up first. Now then. Hold her fast!"

He clambered over the side, and took possession of his charge once more. Morgan and the boys were busy with the sails and soon the *Anna* was well away. They ran before the wind, away out of Stewart's reach. There was little fear of pursuit, however. Tain had carried an axe, and the *Swallow's* steering gear was now a thing to weep over. On and on through the night fled the *Anna*, till the *Swallow's* lights were no longer visible.

Pettigrew mopped his forehead. Morgan at the tiller shouted a question.

"Locked her in the cabin," answered Pettigrew.

"Well, you've got me beat," grinned Morgan. "Abducting a woman at your age! You old Mormon!" His voice changed. "Where are the pearls?"

"She's got 'em."

"She?"

"Yep. They're in a belt round her waist. A man's belt. Too big. It slid too low."

"Well, why did you bring her here?" inquired Morgan helplessly. "What a fool you are! There's no room for a woman oard this ship. Why didn't you take the lt off?"

"As soon as it's light," Pettigrew told m, "you can go right down and take it off urself. ' She ain't a woman, leastways not woman like the women I've met. She's a ld cat, a little hell-fire, spittin', swearin' t. She shot at me. Yes, she did. I t the gun and I kept her covered, while I arted in rummagin' for the pearls. Why e should have 'em, I don't know. I reck- it's Stewart's belt. Made very cunning is, with steel in amongst the leather. I lt that when I had a try at takin' it."

"How do you know the pearls are in it?"

"If they aren't there," said Pettigrew owly, "they're nowhere and we're on a wild ose chase. When she saw me look at the lt her cheeks went white as a sheet and her nds clapped on it like a flash."

He recounted details of the struggle.

"Give me a couple of men next time," he ished. "Up to now I thought women as soft. Soft! They're made of iron. 's all this ju-jitsu and hockey and stuff ey learn 'em at school. Like boys. Ay, e's dressed in boy's breeches, too! The ssy!"

"You've muffed it," said Morgan, an- ily. "What the devil are we going to do ith her? We can't put her in an open boat d set her adrift. What are we going to with her?"

"Blamed if I know," said Pettigrew with oom.

The subject of their conversation rested durance vile in the locked cabin. Petti- ew had flung her down as a man might ng a sack of potatoes into the hold. She hed in every limb. Her head was buzzing d she felt an overwhelming desire to cry. e choked it back and stood up. The bin in which she found herself was much aller than that of the *Swallow*. In one rner lay a wooden chest, scarred with arks made by a hot iron. By it lay a pair sea-boots. The light of the hanging mp shone on these, and on the shiny folds an oiler tossed beside them. The wink- reflections seemed to jeer at her. The or of a locker had fallen open and on the or lay three charts, one of them crumpled d torn as though two men had quarrelled er it. She moved to the door and shook unavailingly. Far off came shouts and e creaking of the sails, dim sounds heard intly. For a long time she sat in wide-eyed misery, planning escape, and, failing that, defence. Presently with the weariness of youth, she fell asleep.

When she awoke it was broad daylight. The door stood open. Regarding her stood a tall man with a shock of black hair and keen gray eyes. She sat up, staring at him blankly. He came straight to the point.

"Give me that belt."

She sat up defiantly, chin in air.

"Certainly not. Why should I?"

"There are pearls in it."

"Yes. But not yours."

"Whose, then?"

"They belong to Mr. Stewart and my brother."

"They're stolen."

"That's a lie," she burst out indignantly.

"I'm not going to argue with you," said Morgan. "I intend to have those pearls. They're mine by right. Stewart's a thief. Perhaps you don't know he robbed a man to get the chart that he used to reach Taukura? Well, he did. It was my chart. The pearls are mine. Hand them over."

"Yes, a pretty story," observed Valerie with contempt. "Why don't you make up a convincing lie while you're about it? You must think I'm green if you think I'm going to swallow that."

"I don't care whether you believe me or not," retorted Morgan with heat. "It's the truth anyway. Give me that belt."

"I won't."

"It's absurd to take this line," he told her. "You're alone here. You haven't got Stewart at your back. I'm giving you every chance. Do you want me to use force?"

"You talk like a bully and no doubt you'll act like one."

He flushed.

"I'm a determined man. You'll find I'm not to be played with. Now this is the last chance. Will you give it up?"

"No."

They eyed each other calculatingly. Morgan noted the stubborn resistance in every line of the rigid body that set him at such utter defiance. He made a cautious movement and instantly she was on her guard, her eyes blazing in a set white face.

But she knew this enemy was very different from Pettigrew, fat and short of breath. Morgan's sinewy arms were long and cunning. His hands gripped her shoulders in an unmistakable manner.

"I mean it," he was saying, "and I shall get them. Is it worth while—the humiliation of having them taken? Wouldn't it be rather saner to give them up?"

She was enraged at his calm assurance, but she knew he would do as he said. Her eyes fell on a coil of rope that lay on Pettigrew's sea-chest. He had come prepared then! Had he so little chivalry, so little regard for women that he would stoop to force? Oh, he was cruel, cruel! Her heart sank and she bit her lips to choke back a sob of dismay. Till that moment it had seemed a glorious adventure—even at its worst. But the sight of the coil of rope and the implacable purpose in Morgan's eyes changed things in an instant. She was suddenly and ingloriously afraid. How long would he stand so still and intent? When would he lift those hands that were eating into her soft flesh like iron?

"Let me go," she said with a little cry. "Please—you're hurting me."

He relaxed his hold.

"Give me the pearls," he said.

PETTIGREW, peering cautiously through the open skylight, held his breath, and wondered how it would end. It occurred to him that he ought to go down and offer assistance. He wriggled uneasily at the idea of meeting Valerie's scornful gaze. As he watched, spellbound, he saw her hands hovering uncertainly about her waist. They fell to her sides again and she lifted a flushed face. Morgan did not move. Then, unexpectedly, she tore at the belt with fierce fingers, and flung it to the further side of the cabin. Morgan picked it up, taking no more notice of her, and carried it to the table. Pettigrew closed the skylight and hurried down to the cabin.

"You've got 'em, then?"

"Ay."

"—— Almighty, but Stewart's a cute one," opined Pettigrew. "Here, try it this way. Look, let me hold the end and you—that's it. See, there's a thin steel casing between the leather. Each pocket fastenin' with a safety catch. Say, I'd like to know what he carried in this last time. 'Member the Van Goor diamonds? Shouldn't wonder if that . . . Careful now, careful. Tilt it a bit. That's right."

They took out the pearls one by one, examining them in silence with keen, discriminating eyes. But at sight of the pearl that Stewart had christened the Queen of Taukura, Pettigrew broke into a wealth of admiring profanity. Morgan could only stare unbelievingly. His dry lips twitched. So this was Stewart's stolen harvest! This was what he had filched by means of a dead man's chart. He had a swift vision of Stewart's eager face and the cupidity that lurked in the curious light eyes. How he must have triumphed when he found this wonder of pearls! Pettigrew was waxing tearful, overcome by his own eloquence and the immense naive joy of part ownership of this marvel. To Valerie, crouching against the locker, they seemed like two actors in a drama, apart from all time and space. In their eyes was the age-old lust of possession, the lust that had burned in Stewart when he held the Queen of Taukura in his cupped palm for the first time. Tain's cry of "Moriani!" fell on heedless ears. Presently even Pettigrew became silent. They stood in a dream.

"Pity Donovan ain't here."

"Donovan!" echoed Morgan. His face darkened. "That's still to be settled with Stewart. I'll get him. I'll get him yet. He shall pay for Donovan."

"New York," said Pettigrew, his eyes fastened on the Queen of Taukura. "New York, eh? We'll get a better price there than Sydney. Baumgarten will buy like a shot."

"New York—or London."

"London?"

"Why not? We'll get as good an offer as any that Baumgarten's likely to make."

"I dunno," said Pettigrew doubtfully. "London, eh? Gosh, it's twenty years since I was there. I suppose the Highway's still goin' strong. Pennyfields, too . . . an' the mist creepin' up from the river . . . I wonder if Ah Foo's still livin' in Wellington Court—the perishin' Chink lifted a watch off me—"

"The only point about Baumgarten is that New York's closer than London."

"Closer?"

"Ay. The sooner we get rid of the goods the better," said Morgan significantly. "How long do you suppose it'll be before we see Stewart's red head again?"

Pettigrew grew thoughtful.

"Maybe we'd better say New York. Anyway, we know Baumgarten, an' we're dead sure to clear a decent profit if we deal with him."

MORGAN stowed the pearls in their case and fastened Stewart's belt carefully about his waist. Pettigrew, sweating with emotion and heat, mopped his forehead with his sleeve. It was torn and he remembered that he had ripped it the night before on board the *Swallow* in pursuit of the dark-haired girl. His jaw dropped, Morgan looked round.

"What did you say?"

Pettigrew pointed to the crouching figure in the corner.

"What about the girl?"

Morgan's gaze followed his.

"What about her?"

"Well—I mean—what are we goin' to do with her?" demanded Pettigrew. "She don't belong to us."

Valerie sat up.

"Well, I didn't ask to come here, did I? Perhaps you'd like me to jump back into the sea to oblige you. I'd prefer it to staying here."

"You would, would you?" said Pettigrew, taken aback. "Well, you've got a nice tongue for a young gel, you have."

Morgan wrinkled his brows.

"It's deuced awkward."

They stared at her in perplexity.

"Of course it is," Val agreed. "And whose fault is it? That fat man's."

"You—I—fat man—"

"You are fat," said Val, cruelly. "I suppose if I say it again you'll hit me. You're perfect models of chivalry, aren't you? I suppose it's never occurred to you that I got wet last night. I've been here hours in these soggy clothes, and all you can do is bully me. Brutes!"

"Now see here," said Morgan, "you've called us names enough. We're not brutes and we're not thieves."

She laughed.

"I say we're not thieves," repeated Morgan, his temper rising. "Stewart found Taukura and took those pearls, by means of a stolen chart. It's he—he and that precious scoundrel of a Lamotte—that ought to be called that. We had to get those pearls—"

"Paul Lamotte is my brother," she reminded him icily.

"That won't save him," said Morgan. "He's a scoundrel. One of these days he'll get his deserts. May I be there to help on the good work! Now listen. We'll beat up north and put you ashore at Kikia, where you started from. You can wait there till your brother comes—"

"An' you can think yourself lucky," burst in Pettigrew, "that you're not shoved into the longboat and set adrift. Many men wouldn't have thought twice about it. Either that—or something else."

At his tone, Valerie turned scarlet. It was impossible to mistake the meaning of his words, and the glance that accompanied them. Morgan waited impassively till the argument should end.

But Valerie had turned her face to the wall, biting her lips to keep back the tears that fought their way under her quivering lids. When she looked round again the cabin was empty.

BY MID-DAY Pettigrew's anger had evaporated. He even felt somewhat ashamed of his hot words. The glimpse of Valerie's heaving shoulders as he left the cabin affected him profoundly, though he would not admit it. She had wounded his pride to the quick by calling him fat, but he had to agree, ruefully, that it was an apt description of his person. His innate good nature refused to allow him to cherish a grievance for long. He peered through the skylight and saw her huddled in a disconsolate heap on the floor. Sleeping? No, her hand moved. Crying? Perhaps. He began to feel uneasy. After all, he argued, it was hard on her, being carried off like that. Naturally she was scared, and when women get scared they didn't care what they said. He worked himself into a state of indignation against Morgan, smoking peacefully in the shadow of the squaresail.

"Hey!" he said truculently.

"What is it?" came Morgan's surprised voice.

"Are you goin' to leave that girl down there all day? I'll bet she's hungry. An' her clothes aren't dry."

"Well, she can please herself," retorted Morgan with superb indifference, and returned to his pipe.

Pettigrew grunted, and went downstairs. At the sound of his approach Valerie lifted a tear-stained face. The sight went to Pettigrew's heart.

"Come on deck for a bit," he coaxed. "It's not so hot now, with the breeze blowin'. Maybe we've all been a bit free with our tongues. Well, well, I'm not one to bear malice, nor is Morgan, if he's treated right. You keep a civil tongue in your head and we'll get on better than we did this morning. Come on and have a bit of a blow."

She shook her head, deaf to all persuasion. At last he withdrew and stumped on deck. Morgan greeted him with interest.

"Where is she?"

"She won't come up. She's cryin' herself sick in that stiflin' hole, and her face is like a dish-cloth. We'll have her ill if we're not careful."

"I'll fetch her up," said Morgan.

He rose, and disappeared below. Val heard him coming. Already she could distinguish between their steps. She stiffened herself at his approach. He came in and stood regarding her.

"Come on deck," he said at last.

She shook her head mutinously.

"Do as I say," he ordered.

Still she did not move.

He bent down and lifted her in his arms as if she were a child. When he set her down gently beside Pettigrew in the shadow of the squaresail, she was breathless with indignation. Pettigrew grinned amiably.

"That's better," he said. He rose ponderously and went to the forescuttle. "Pepa!" they heard him bellow, "bring bullamacow for missie. Quick now. Savvy?"

Pepa's voice came back, "Savvy, Pettigua."

"I'll bet you're hungry," said Pettigrew returning. "Wait till you've eat a bit. Things always look different the other side of a meal."

He watched with interest while she ate the corned beef and freshly roasted yams that Pepa brought. He himself went and found a pineapple and cut into its juiciness to tempt her appetite.

"Women and cats are dainty eaters," he remarked by way of conversation. "Ever watch a cat feed? Me and Donovan used to have one on the *Happy Warrior*. Used to sit up like a Christian with her own plate in front of her, an' we'd feed her tit-bits from ours. Donovan used to call her Cleopatra, though I did tell him it wasn't exactly seemly to waste a good Bible name on an animal. However, he took to callin' her Cleepy for short and it didn't sound so bad. More pineapple?"

"No, thanks."

"That's the first polite answer you've given up to now," commented Pettigrew.

"Polite?" echoed Val. "You carry me off in this extraordinary way and lock me up and bully me—and then you expect me to be polite!"

"Well—"

"It's no use explaining. You're keeping me here against my will. I've got a right to ask you to put me aboard the *Swallow* again."

She glanced from one to the other and her scornful gaze fastened on Morgan.

"I suppose you're afraid."

The slow blood mounted to his face at the taunt, and his hands clenched.

"If any man had said that to me," he said, "I'd thrash him till he begged pardon for a lie. You're only a woman. I can't touch you."

He left them abruptly and went to Tain at the tiller. They watched him take it out of the brown hands into his own strong grasp. They were sailing near the wind—too near for Pettigrew's liking. But he knew better than to argue with Morgan in this present mood. He turned to the girl accusingly.

"Don't you go making remarks like that. You'll upset him and he'll do something rash. He's ugly when he's roused and reckless as the devil. Maybe you didn't mean it. You see, Morgan don't know much about women. A man's man, as the sayin' is. Now—I'm different."

He smiled self-consciously and she smiled back, unwillingly.

"I'm soft-'earted," he confessed. "Maybe it's wrong, but there you are. I can't help it. I've always loved the girls. I'm by way of bein' a bit of a connysher, too. New York girls are smart and cheeky; 'Frisco girls are sly; the girls in New 'leans are lovely but they're slow. Oh, gosh, yes, darned slow. In London you'll find the pick of the bunch, pale and fine-skinned, with straight shoulders that say, 'Keep off,' and eyes that say, 'Come on.' Oh, yes, give me London every time. When anyone says London to me, that's what I think of. Girls and the river and the smell of English beer."

He lapsed into silence. Presently he cut a quid of tobacco and began to chew thoughtfully. The breeze showed signs of slackening, and both he and Morgan scanned the sails with anxiety. It would be fatal if they lost the wind. Every delay meant an advantage to Stewart. Even with her damaged steering gear, the *Swallow* was a thing to be reckoned with. Knowing Stewart's tenacity of purpose, they knew the fury of his pursuit. Their eyes veered continually southward, straining for sight of a sail on the horizon. But the hours went on and none appeared.

THE afternoon fled by and the sun began to send the shadows slanting across the deck. Val sat apart, a disconsolate little figure, and watched the sun slide down the sky. The *Anna* ploughed on through the incarnadined sea, fighting stubbornly northward. There was an uncanny look about the sky. It was too vivid, too brazen. Each separate shadow on the ship stood out with startling clearness, clean cut and distinct. Pettigrew mooned aimlessly about, silent and anxious. In the stern sat Morgan, bolt upright, his head raised as if he scented danger. Pettigrew jerked his thumb to windward.

"See those clouds?"

Low on the horizon they lay in a sinister ridge. Morgan's eyes narrowed.

"We'll be lucky if we don't get a storm," he said. "There's a queer touch in the air to-night."

The sun had gone and the brief twilight set in. Still Valerie did not move. Pettigrew went up to her.

"Best go below," he said. "It'll be dark in a minute, an' the air's chill."

Even as he spoke, she shivered. But she would not move. He left her at last and went back to Morgan. But Morgan cut him short.

"What do I care what she does with herself? You can waste your time coaxing her if you like. She's nothing to me."

It was too dark for Pettigrew to see the expression on the other's face. But he guessed what obstinate look he would find there and turned away grunting. The boys were unusually quiet. There was no sound of high chattering voices, no burst of giggling laughter, nothing but an occasional muttering. Pettigrew shook his head. He was worried at the quietness. In his opinion the Kanakas were akin to animals, who smell disaster before it comes. Their surliness was the surliness of dogs before a thunder-storm. There was no moon and he wandered up and down in the darkness, trying in vain to quell the nameless fears that beset him.

Suddenly, without warning, the squall struck them.

All around, the sea was churned into a seething mass of foam, where the *Anna* tossed like a cork. Out of the darkness, tall waves leapt up to engulf her, and sank down, only to be supplanted by others, taller, fiercer, more threatening. One of them shot over the side, flooding the deck, and wringing from Valerie a startled cry. Frantic feet fled past. She heard Pettigrew's voice. "Put her up into the wind! Put her right up into the wind!" Morgan's answer was lost in the darkness. She could discern dim forms that wrestled with the sails, urged on by Pettigrew's scattered curses. The *Anna* struggled gamely against the cruelty of the curling waves. She plunged and reared like a horse beset by sharp-fanged wolves. The hiss and surge of the swirling water, the screaming wind, had her, defenceless, at their mercy. A wall of water rose up beside Val and covered her, drenching her to the skin. She clung for her life to a stanchion. A body swept by her, fighting impotently. It was Pepa the cook. He disappeared over the side into the darkness.

Someone stumbled forward. It was Morgan with a knife in his hand. He was going to cut the halyards. It was the ship's only chance. Val could make him out as a dim figure that slashed and hacked with frenzied force. Once he fell back, downed by the weight of a wave, but he sprang to his task again, half-blinded, his breath coming in great sobbing gasps. His hands were bleeding, and the salt water stung them like nettles. Still he worked on, desperately.

But he was too late. As he cut through the last rope, there was a crash. He stood a moment appalled. The main mast had failed them. It fell athwart the ship, forcing a heavy list to starboard. He sprang clear of the mass of cordage and his foot struck something that moved. He bent down. "That girl," he thought. He shouted for Pettigrew, shouted himself hoarse, while his bleeding hands struggled to launch the longboat. There was no answer. Slowly, slowly, the *Anna* was heeling, dragged down by the weight of the broken mast. The next wave might put the finishing touch. At great risk, he clambered over the mass of wreckage, searching, calling. His hands touched a naked body crushed under the fallen mast. He stumbled on. But there was no Pettigrew.

Sick at heart he fought his way back to the longboat. A sudden thought came to him, and he groped toward the place where his foot had touched Val. He spoke, but she did not answer. He put his hands under her arms and dragged her limp body to the side. A wave swept over them, but he held on grimly. With enormous effort he launched the boat. Summoning his last ounce of energy he pushed off. The waves seized the boat hungrily, hurling it from one to another till the dim outline of the *Anna* was lost to sight.

CHAPTER IX

JUST before dawn the wind dropped. As if she had waited for this moment, Val stirred and opened her eyes. For what seemed an eternity she saw nothing, remembered nothing. Then recollection came rushing back.

"What is it?" she asked in a hoarse whisper. "What's happened?"

"We're in the longboat," answered Morgan laconically. "The *Anna's* gone down to Davy Jones. Keep still. It'll soon be light."

"Where are the others? Where is—where is—"

Morgan made no answer. She gave a sob of dismay.

"He was kind in his way," she said.

They were silent, each thinking of Pettigrew. The sun rose at last on a waste of tumbling waters where the white horses still galloped. There was no sign of the *Anna*. Valerie shivered and sat up. The back of her head felt sore and tender to the touch. On her right arm a purple bruise was developing rapidly. She glanced at Morgan. He was white with fatigue and on his hands were gashes where the blood had clotted. He stretched his arms tentatively, and she divined that their stiffness was due to the hold he had kept on her. She shuddered at thought of what might have happened but for him.

"Please believe how grateful I am," she began, almost shyly. He cut her short.

"Don't be a fool. You couldn't be left there."

His moroseness silenced her. She drew back, chilled. Morgan did not notice her. His heart was torn with pain at thought of Pettigrew. Dead, undoubtedly. But how? The mast? Had it caught him in its treacherous fall and smashed his head like an egg? Perhaps he had been washed overboard, caught away on the crest of some devouring wave. In a month's time, maybe, some trader would sight the body, swollen, unrecognizable in its hideousness. Or it might drift to some reef, there to be battered to pieces against the coral.

He shut his eyes and instantly he saw Pettigrew, cutting a quid of tobacco and smiling at him, a sort of secret grin that denoted understanding of some joke that they shared. Morgan groaned, and opened his eyes again. They fell on Val. She had taken a comb from her pocket and was making gallant attempts at a toilet. The sight moved him to laughter, too long, too loud. But it let out of him some of the pent-up feeling that had weighed him down when he thought of Pettigrew. A ship lost, a man dead, she herself alive by a chance, and she could trouble about her hair! The puzzle of the eternal feminine mystified him.

"It's getting hot," she remarked.

It was true. The sun, climbing steadily higher, began to beat down fiercely. It had been welcome at first to their cold, wet bodies. They had turned themselves this way and that to dry the sodden clothes which clung so heavily. In another hour the heat would be unbearable. He looked about him in dismay.

Valerie was oblivious of the coming danger. She had found the water-keg and biscuits that Pettigrew had always insisted were to be stored in the longboat. She seized the dipper that Morgan used for baling and measured out a generous supply of water. Her action awoke him to reality.

"Hey, steady! How long do you suppose that water's going to last?"

She looked at him in a troubled way as he took the dipper from her.

"Do you think this is a pleasure trip?" pursued Morgan irately. "I suppose you'll want to wash in it next. It's going to be so damned hot in a couple of hours that you'll wish you were dead. We want every drop of water there is."

He poured back the greater part of the precious liquid into the barrel. She gulped down the small portion he handed her and sat meekly by while he measured out his own share. They each ate a biscuit, and then set themselves to the improvisation of some kind of shelter. Valerie's coat solved the problem. It was an old white riding coat, full-skirted and of a good length. Stretched across the thwarts it made a kind of cave where Val lay huddled, protected in some measure from the fierceness of noontide.

THE day passed on and she sank into a kind of stupor, partly through weariness, partly through the dull pain in her aching head. Morgan moved restlessly, unable to keep still. Ever and again he scanned the horizon for some glimpse of a sail, some smudge of smoke that would mean salvation.

But there was nothing. The hours crawled by on leaden feet, bringing no hope to the watcher. The intense hot blue of the sky, where the sun flamed like a brazen ball, hurt his eyes. He stood up, sweeping the far horizon with anxious gaze. Nothing, nothing, nothing, except the cursed waves, jostling the longboat in their careless race.

The terror of the open sea, the panic that seizes a man in the presence of pitiless immensity, hovered perilously near. He fought against it, battering at it with all the strength of his common sense. Of course they would be picked up. If not, they were drifting towards Paviete and surely there was hope of encountering some kind of craft. Yet behind him skulked the thin ghosts of dead seamen who had perished before their time, killed by the sun and the sea and the madness that comes with thirst. They were lurking about, watching him, waiting for him . . . . Thirst! The word hissed in his brain with the sound of water dropped on hot iron. The little cask held just enough for three days. After that—

Perhaps Pettigrew was lucky after all.

Those pearls! Yes, they were safe. His hands wandered to Stewart's curious belt, clasped securely about his own body. Was there some curse on them? Donovan had been killed. Pettigrew—there was little chance of Pettigrew being alive. Stewart—Lamotte—the girl—what luck had the pearls brought them? He thought of himself, derelict and in peril. The question haunted him, nor could his constrained laughter undo its menace.

So the two of them endured the tortured hours till sundown. Toward evening Valerie revived a little with the cooler air. She sat up and demanded water.

With a jealous hand Morgan dealt out the meagre ration and they ate and drank gravely, their eyes sombre and distressed.

"Any idea where we are?" asked Valerie after a long silence.

"We're caught in a current going south. Now when we were wrecked we were heading north. We'd left Paviete due south. We're going back."

"You mean—"

"I mean that if we hit land at all, we'll hit Paviete."

"And—if we don't?"

"We'll die," he said, bluntly. "If you know any prayers, say 'em now. You'll never be in a tighter hole than this."

"We may get picked up."

"It's not very likely. Paviete's right out of the trade route. A trader calls once a month to take off the *bêche-de-mer* that Chang collects. But that's about the only craft that you'll see in these waters, unless it's an odd schooner, running a contraband cargo, or a lugger prospecting for pearls."

"Well, perhaps that trader—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You're not very cheerful," she pouted, and he turned on her angrily.

"What is there to be cheerful about? I'm telling you the truth of the mess we're in. What do you want me to say? Tell you pretty lies and raise your hopes, I suppose. You women live soft and you can't bear it when things like this happen. All you're good for is to be petted and taken care of—a mixture of children and Persian cats. That's what you are. You're afraid of life, afraid of facing things that hurt. Well, you're up against something now that's got to be faced. We may come out all right. Very likely we shan't. You've got to grin and bear it, whichever way it turns out. But if you think I'm going to sit here and stroke your hand and tell you it's all going to be all right, you've made a mistake. I'm not Stewart."

IN THE fading light she could see the anger that rose to his face at the name.

"If it hadn't been for that rat, we shouldn't be here now."

"Please leave Mr. Stewart's name out of it," said Val with dignity. "He's not here to defend himself."

"You feel like that about him, do you?" retorted Morgan keenly. "Huh! I see he's made good use of the shining hours. Did he tell you you were the first woman who'd really understood him, the first woman he'd really cared about? Don't stamp your foot like that. I'll bet he did."

"At any rate he behaves like a gentleman," returned Valerie furiously.

"Many women have said that about him—at the beginning," said Morgan. "I'm saying nothing that I wouldn't say to his face. He's rotten—rotten all through."

"You say that because you're his enemy."

"And so is every decent man in the Islands," said Morgan hotly.

Valerie made no answer. Beneath the anger that swept over her, there stirred a memory of the distrust of Stewart that had disturbed her on board the *Swallow*. She brushed it aside and turned wrathfully, made angrier by that little stab of unwilling remembrance.

"That's a lie. Mr. Stewart is a brave gentleman. I owe my life to him. There was a horrible accident. The boat overturned as we were entering the lagoon at Taukura—"

He snatched at the word.

"Taukura?"

"Yes. I was nearly drowned. He saved me."

"You seem to make a habit of getting saved," he interrupted drily.

It was too dark to see her face, but he guessed at the indignation that blazed in her eyes. She said no more. The stars were flickering in a windy sky, and the breeze increased steadily. The current had them in its grasp, drawing them southward. Morgan dreaded the wind. Every now and then it blew gustily and a wave washed over the boat, wetting them, threatening to overturn their cockle-shell. The first time it happened Valerie uttered a cry of terror. Morgan pulled her to his side and spoke roughly. He knew that the night and the menace of the heaving sea were destroying her nerve. He found an old tobacco tin and thrusting it into her hand, ordered her to help with the baling. He himself worked feverishly. They toiled without ceasing till their arms and their backs ached agonizingly, and it seemed that for centuries they had bent to their heart-rending task. Their numbed arms rose and fell mechanically. The bitter salt water filled their eyes and nostrils. Through their sodden clothes the wind cut to the bone. Blinded, bruised, they dared not relax effort. The night resolved itself into a monotonous endurance, a grim determination to live. They spoke little, hoarding every breath. The boat battled gamely with the waves, now on a crest, now sliding into the blackness of a trough.

In a lull of the wind Morgan heard Val talking. "Down to the sea in ships," she was saying. "They that go down to the sea . . . go down to the sea . . . go down . . . down . . ." she ended abruptly with a laugh that made him frown. He said nothing, and she fell silent.

All through the night they laboured till the east grew gray. At dawn the wind lessened. Heavy-eyed, with old, haggard faces, they worked on, heedless of the passage of time, until the first ray of the sun shot across the sea. Morgan lifted his head and looked around.

"We can rest a bit."

He flung out the words and slid into a heap, falling at once into the deep, drugged slumber of utter exhaustion.

The rising sun found them both huddled in the bottom of the boat. On their worn faces was a look that was strangely triumphant.

FARTHER north the light fell on a ship, a fantastic, incredible hulk whose mainmast had gone. She pitched and rolled alarmingly and wrung heartfelt curses from the man who swayed at the tiller, keeping her head doggedly in the direction of Wakatea. Her decks were a mass of wreckage, and she was leaking badly. At the pumps a single dark figure worked desperately, goaded on by the lash of the steersman's tongue.

"Suppose Moriani here, Moriani not get tired. Moriani work pumps all day, all night, never get tired. Tain weak all same woman, hey? Tain not strong all same Moriani. Damn it all, you heathen, put some beef into it! Savvy?"

"Savvy," answered a sobbing voice, "savvy, Pettigua."

In the following chapters Morgan and Valerie reach Povide—and Chang

On Strike

A Story within a Story of Central America

By JOHN STEUART ERSKINE

BACA laid down his pencil and flung the scrap of paper across the table to me. "The mess for this month comes to nineteen dollars and a quarter each," he announced. I glanced carelessly at the figures and passed the account to Paz.

"Gosh!" said Heller gloomily. "I didn't know you could eat nineteen bucks' worth of rice and beans in a year. Got any change, old man?" He tossed a twenty-dollar bill to Baca and began to balance his budget aloud. "Spent thirty fish last Sunday when I went to port. I guess I've signed for about sixty berries' worth of drinks at Don José's joint. Nineteen simoleons' worth of garbage here . . . Well, I'll have enough left for a hand of poker at Trisagio tonight."

A volley of revolver shots sounded from the labor camp, and a bullet clipped and whined through the banana leaves in front of the house. Baca who, for an Olanchano, had a strange fear of stray lead, slid a little lower in his chair. "If you take my advice," he said solemnly, "you will not venture out of this house tonight. The men have plenty of money, and they will be very drunk and very *bravo*. They are on strike in Chopola already, and only yesterday two Mexican agitators passed through here, stirring up our men. Before the week is done they will strike, and if they do, watch them. One of these days they will learn a lesson from Mexico and will leave not a gringo alive in all Olancho."

Winter looked up from his magazine. "Don't be so damn cheerful," he growled. "I'd hate to get killed before I get my vacation."

Again shouting arose in the drunken camp, the confused roar of men who had looked upon government rum when it was white. The sun was hot upon the drooping banana leaves, the brown steel of the railroad, the zinc roof of the house. The air shimmered around us, and our khaki clothes, where they touched our bodies, clung and became dark. Some great orioles gurgled and sputtered in a mat of plantains as they probed the flower bunches with their red bills, or flew from tree to tree, displaying their chestnut bodies and yellow tails.

"I've been here fifteen years," observed Heller indifferently, "and all the time the men have just been going to rise and wipe us out. Well, here I am still. Some day they will rise, I know; but I'll have died of old age by then probably. No use of worrying about it. I don't. I've seen too many strikes before."

A drunken man staggered up the railroad track and stopped in front of the house to shout that he was a man and that we were children without surnames. Winter's face went suddenly contorted with rage, and he jumped to his feet and picked up his revolver. "Sit down," growled Heller savagely. "What are you going to do about it, kill him? You know you don't intend to. Ignore him. No use getting brave with these people. No use getting afraid of them either."

He pulled a cigarette out of his pocket, tapped it on the table and lit it. "Ever been afraid, Bones? So have I, sometimes. But once I knew a man who let it affect his actions. Did I ever tell you about the time when I ran the tobacco farm near San Pablo? That was years ago.

"I got into this business through an old Southerner from my own state, who came down with the idea that you could make money out of cigars here if you knew how to handle the tobacco. San Pablo is the centre of the district where they make the world's most poisonous cigars, guaranteed to kill at twenty yards. This *paisano* was a good old sort, and we had been together two years when he took fever and nearly died. He went home for a change and to convalesce, and left me in charge. Then I got a letter from him to say that he had lost his nerve and wouldn't be coming back. Instead, he was sending out a nephew of his who understood tobacco, and he hoped that I would carry on with the nephew as I had with him. At the bottom of the letter he put a postscript to say that the nephew was bringing out a wife and son.

"That about finished me. You know how it is in the tropics. Your nerves get so ragged that you can't work with just anybody—and to have a woman messing around the house and tidying up your room and wondering if you've been drinking. I nearly chucked it right then. But you can't very well throw a friend over, so I stayed.

"The nephew, Jim Laridge was his name, came trailing the wife, a boy, and about fifteen trunks. From that moment I couldn't call my soul my own. The wife took charge of it. Well, I didn't mind that so much as I might of. She was one of God's own; not too pretty, but a real, good sport. I never could see why she married Jim. Not that he was a bad sort of guy; he could speak Spanish better than me, and he knew tobacco from the ground up. I saw that I wasn't going to be much use there after the first couple of months. And then I found that I was kind of sorry to go. Maybe it was that I liked the kid; a lively little devil about ten years old, talked more Spanish than English and used to live on his old horse. Maybe it was that I hadn't spoken to a white woman for a matter of years.

"But it wasn't long before I began to suspect that there was something wrong with that family. You know the sort of feeling. They were too fond of each other. Mrs. Laridge never seemed to talk of anything except Jim; and when he was away, she kept on looking out for him sideways—you know. Well, when a woman does that to a man she's been married to eleven years, there can't help but be something wrong with him. She was fond of the kid, too, but that's normal. Well, I never saw the kid slobbering over Jim. He didn't seem particularly afraid of him, but he kept out of his way.

"We used to have a watchman guarding the tobacco at night. Once as I was getting to sleep, a gun went off just outside my window, and I jumped up and saw the watchman running for his life in the moonlight and firing his revolver in the air as he ran. At the corner of the wall stood something that flapped white wings and moaned. It turned, and I saw that it had a Jack-o'-lantern head. I laughed like hell for I knew that it must be the kid. Then the door opened, and Jim ran out, grabbed the kid, sheet and all, and whaled him with his cartridge belt. 'You young devil,' he shouted. 'You've scared your mother half to death.' Well, she came out of the door, too, and cried when she saw Jim beating the kid; but she didn't look scared. I didn't like Jim quite as well after that, and when next I went to town, I brought the kid back a lot of 'Nick Carter' stories in Spanish and told him not to let his mother see him with them. I knew he'd enjoy them more that way, and I felt I owed him something for the sight of that watchman picking up dust in his pockets as he went across the *patio*. So the kid and I got to be good friends.

"NOW, Jim was a pretty good scout on the whole. He knew that I didn't know tobacco from dock-leaves, but he didn't start trying to edge me out as soon as he'd learnt the place like lots of men would have done. But pretty soon I noticed that it was time for me to move on. When you get to leaving your matches in the house and coming back to hunt for them just in the hope of getting another look at a woman, especially when that woman watches another man with eyes like a dog's at dinner time, you know that it's time to shift if you've still got the pluck.

"Jim was on a trip to Alvarado; but as soon as he got back I said to him: 'Well, Jim, you know the place as well as I do now. You've no need for me here. I think I'd better get going again.' He looked surprized and maybe a bit pleased, which was only natural, for every man likes to run his own show. 'Do you really want to go, old man?' he asked. 'Well, stay a while at any rate, and I'll try to sell another lot of cigars and pay up your whole share.' 'I don't mind about the money,' I said. 'Send it along after me when you get it.' He looked worried. 'There's a strike in the banana farms,' he told me. 'I wish you'd wait until it's over, because it may affect us, and my wife's afraid of these people and awfully nervous.' 'I hadn't noticed it,' I said. He got angry. 'How the devil should you know anything about her when you've known her only three months?' he demanded. 'Of course, I'll stay if you really want,' I agreed, and cursed myself for being so glad I wasn't going just yet.

"No sooner had I agreed to stay than I got into hot water. The kid and I were great friends, but he began to get gay with me; to put tacks on my chair or unbuckle my stirrup straps so that I'd bang my chin on the saddle when I tried to mount. Then he put a lizard into my bed, a live *iguana*, and scared me out of a year's growth. It isn't so funny as it sounds, to put your bare foot on something scaly and wriggling in this country where you're never forgetful of snakes. So I vowed I would square that account without delay.

"I invited the kid to come for a ride with me, and he accepted readily enough, because he liked me. We rode by the shed where the women were twisting, rolling, and wrapping the cigars and I stopped and took some of the very worst, the four for a cent ropes, like the things Paz smokes. When we were well away from the village I pulled out one of these fumigators and lit it. The smoke hit me in the chest like a boxing glove, but I staggered for a moment and recovered my balance. The leaves of the trees above me turned yellow and drooped. A passing buzzard got a whiff of the smoke and fainted, and though he recovered, his feathers had turned white and he passed as a king vulture the rest of his days.

"I puffed away at this gas bomb and looked patronizingly down at the kid. 'Good cigar,' I said. 'I'd offer you one, kid, only you're too young and your mother wouldn't let you smoke it.' Of course he flared up at that. 'The hell you say,' he replied. (I was teaching him to swear like a Christian.) 'I've smoked more cigars than you have.' So I gave him the stick of dynamite and he touched a match to it. I saw him quiver and turn a pale green. He took the infernal machine out and looked at it; then he put it back in his fly-trap and puffed again. His eyes began to look like soup-plates. Then he dropped the reins and reeled out of the saddle. I caught him by the seat of the pants and held him up while he made his liver feel lonely, and I whispered in his ear: 'How about that *iguana* in my bed?' He looked at me out of the corner of a fishy eye and then set to work on last week's menu. But I knew that he felt that he owed me something on the deal. I took him home to his mother and told her that it looked as though he'd eaten something that wasn't good for him. I was sorry afterward, because the little devil never told her what I'd done to him. She'd never have forgiven me and, well, I shouldn't have liked that.

"Our labor began to get restless. You know the feeling, a little more difficulty in getting work done, sour looks and occasional insolence from the men. There were new faces everywhere, men who had run away from the troubles on the coast and had brought with them the news—quite untrue, of course—of the looting of the coast towns and the wiping out of the gringos.

"I told Jim what was going to happen; that we'd get little or no work done for some weeks, but that beyond storing our tobacco carefully we needn't worry. Then suddenly the men went out, took to shouting Bolshevik rubbish about Olancho for the Olanchanans. Soon those men who used to bring their sick babies to us to doctor were suggesting that they cut the tripe out of us. 'A dollar a day' was their watchword—as though they hadn't been glad to get eighteen cents before. But a strike in this country is more a feeling of race hatred than of economic trouble. They call it a strike, just as they call their country a republic, because the name is fashionable."

THE drunken laborer, becoming bored with cursing us and receiving no response, began to fling stones which rattled on the tin roof. "Your man, Heller," I pointed out. It was always Heller's men who made trouble, for discipline was not his long suit.

"I know that," he said angrily. "I'll cane the pants off him tomorrow, but what d'you expect me to do now?

"The strike had been on about ten days," he continued, "when Jim came to me looking as worried as a hen with its tail on fire. 'What do you think of this?' he demanded, tossing me a paper. 'I've had these in Mexico and they mean trouble.' It was a scrawled letter in Spanish, saying that unless ten thousand dollars were left under the Sesacapa bridge before eleven o'clock on Thursday, the house would be burnt down. 'Pay no attention,' I advised. 'He's not a professional or he'd have asked five hundred.'

"The strike went on, and the men grew more abusive. Never had I seen a disturbance last so long. Then on the Friday another letter appeared, shoved this time into the boards of my window. 'You have ignored my warning,' it said. 'I shall give you one last chance. If the ten thousand dollars are not placed under the Sesacapa bridge by next Wednesday your house will be surrounded and not a soul will be spared.' I've been threatened with death so often since I've been in Central America that I've ceased to be even amused by it; but I handed the letter over to Jim because he seemed to enjoy getting himself worked up. He began to think up all sorts of Wild West ambushes and such damn foolishness.

"Then Wednesday came. We didn't go out very much these days, because there's no use tempting providence; but in the afternoon Jim came running to me to say that there was a fire in the cornfield at the west of the farm. There was nothing to do but to go and see. I didn't think that it would burn, but you never can tell. We armed two trustworthy men and left them in charge of the house, and we two rode away to where the smoke was coming from. We reached it in about an hour and we found that the fire was in a patch of woodland too far away from us to do any damage.

"We turned and rode homewards; and as we went, we talked over the strike and the possibilities of trouble. I said what I had always said, that it would soon be over; but I added that we had to depend upon what happened on the coast. For if the soldiers there were turned on to shooting strikers, they would scatter and we might expect violence here where there were no soldiers to protect us. Jim didn't like the idea. What married man would? He was fond of his wife, though of course not so much as she deserved. He kept on talking about having seen this before in Mexico.

"Then we rounded the corner of the stone corral and came in sight of the *hacienda*. 'God help us,' said Jim hoarsely. 'I'd forgotten it was Wednesday. There they are.' A hundred men were gathered around the house, and when they saw us, they shouted and waved their machetes. We hesitated. 'Looks like trouble,' I remarked. 'Let's try talking to them.' Some of the men detached themselves from the mob and began to run towards us. Jim wheeled his horse. 'I'm going to San Pablo for the soldiers,' he cried. I snatched his rein. 'You can't, man,' I said. 'Your wife's inside there. We've got to bluff this out.' His heavy quirt bit into the back of my hand and in surprise I let go. 'Here they come,' he shrieked and then he jammed his spurs into the horse's side and was gone. That shook me a bit, but I turned and rode to meet the men. If I was quaking when I greeted them I don't think they saw it. 'What do you want here?' I asked. And with one voice they shouted: 'Work'!

"I talked to those men like a Dutch uncle, explaining to them just what damn fools they had been making of themselves, and they agreed quite cheerfully: '*Eso es, patrón. Es así.*' I singled out some of them to get the place into order the next day and told the rest to come and be sorted out in the evening. We hadn't work enough for half of them. Then I shooed them all away, tied up my horse, and walked into the house.

"Jim's wife met me at the door. 'What were the men shouting about?' she asked. 'Strike's over,' I said, and I took her hands intending to kiss her and explain it away as the enthusiasm of the moment. 'Why did Jim ride away?' she demanded. That checked me. I looked down at her and—God, how lonely I was! He had deserted us, so I owed him no loyalty. If I told her, would she throw in her hand and call for a redeal? I was nine high, so I couldn't help gaining by it. I tell you I was mad about her. Then I saw that the anxiety in her eyes had nothing to do with me, that it was all for the Jim who she had been bolstering up into an ideal for eleven years. She was no fool. She knew as well as I did that he was a coward; but she wouldn't admit it, even to herself. It would be a big shock to her, might even mess up her life altogether, if she knew that I'd seen through him. And Jim was a good enough fellow in ordinary times. 'You see, we had sent for the soldiers,' I explained. 'Jim went to try and stop them from coming, now the trouble's over.' She looked puzzled for a moment. Then she suggested hopefully: 'It was brave of him to go alone in these bad times, wasn't it?' 'Brave as hell,' I said, and because I couldn't stand the sight of her any more, I muttered something about work and went out.

"I walked over to the office. The door was open, and I saw the kid sitting at my table. I tiptoed up behind him, my feet making no sound on the mud floor. He had dipped his hand in the ink and had printed it large and black on a sheet of paper and under it he was writing in Spanish: *If the ten thousand dollars are not delivered* . . . I picked the little brute up in my hands and for a moment I felt like whaling the life out of him for the trouble he'd caused. Then I saw the funny side of it and I sat down on the window-sill and laughed until I cried."

THE drunken laborer had now wearied of throwing stones at the roof of the house. He picked up an iron fish-plate and staggered up the front steps. Heller reached through the doorway behind him and brought out his shotgun, looked to see that it was loaded, cocked it, and aimed it. The laborer, the fish-plate ready for a blow, jerked open the screen door and stared into the mouth of the shotgun. He shrieked, pitched head-foremost down the steep steps, picked himself up, ran twice into the barbed wire fence in an attempt to negotiate the gate and then disappeared into the bananas. Heller replaced the shotgun and continued without a change of voice.

"Whenever anybody talks to me about strikes now, I think of Jim Laridge who deserted his wife because of a danger he'd built up out of a kid's practical joke. Things are never so dangerous as you think them. Some day, of course, the strike will come, the real anti-gringo riot—but not yet."

The shots and shouts in the camp ceased suddenly, and we looked at each other in surprise. "Soldiers must have come," I suggested. There was a sound of running feet outside.

"*Mandador*, *mandador*," called a respectful voice. Heller heaved himself to his feet and walked to the edge of the verandah. "*Mandador*, I have lost thirty dollars," cried the voice. "Tomás owed me that much for my month's work, and now someone has killed him."

"Wait for me in the camp with his woman and the other *mozos* tomorrow morning," commanded Heller. "Paz, ring up the office and tell them to send some flowers. Tomás Cruz has just been murdered. Now, who's for riding to Trisagio with me to the poker game?"

Beast of the BOSVELD

A Novelette of a Zulu Uprising Written by a Man who was for Years a Next Door Neighbor of the Zulus

By

E. VAN LIER RIBBINK

A CROCODILE hunt was the last thing in my immediate plans, though I had hoped to get around to it sooner or later. But here we were, headed for the Umvoti River and the Zulu country. Not even the lure of fresh lion signs on that bright morning in November made me regret that I had listened to my young friend Chuck, changed my itinerary, and joined him in what appeared to be a wild-goose chase. But it wasn't, as we were to learn speedily.

"I've got a big kaffir signed up for this stunt," grinned Chuck. "I'll drive the flivver. Lions? They're a Bronx house-cat alongside these crocs. Besides, there's a diamond in it!" His freckled countenance glowed.

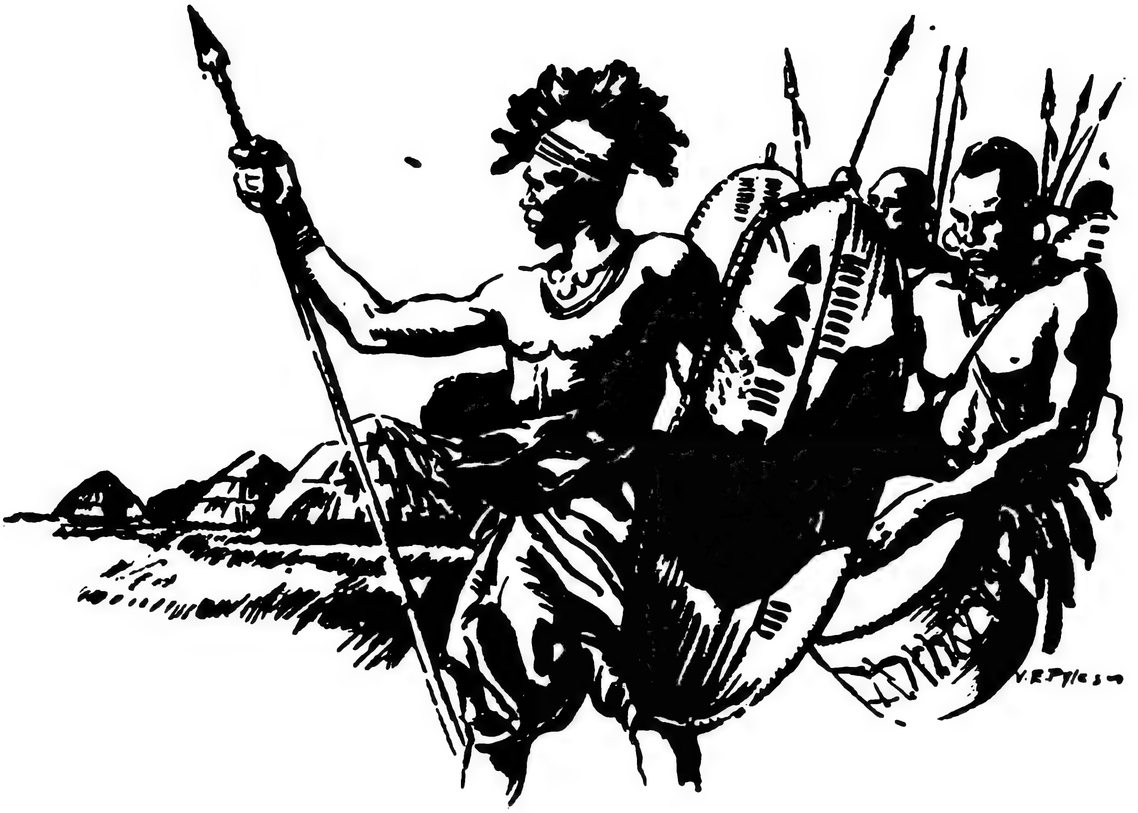
I've often wondered since how he got his tip about the baby-eating beast, otherwise the Sacred Crocodile. Umjala the Zulu, whom he "signed up," had been a menial about the Rand for eighteen years and had breathed absolutely nothing of the secret to any one.

But Chuck had a way about him, a knack at reaching men's innermost confidences. We Americans on the Gold Reef did not associate with any of the blacks, though free of the prejudices of the British and Boers. Chuck wasn't different, exactly; but from the time he landed in Durban he had mixed in his democratic American way with everybody, in the line of business—selling flivvers. The natives were good buyers. In some manner he had reached the heart of Umjala the Zulu.

I had actually made preparations for my lion hunt, which would have taken me into Mozambique, when Chuck interceded. My four Basutos and Jan had been hired through Van der Merwe and Prinsloo, my Boer companions. We had obtained provisions, tents, knives, guns, a goodly supply of sundried game meat, and a cargo of pungent Magaliesberg tobacco.

We were in Pretoria, all set and ready to give the word to trek. Van der Merwe and Prinsloo were seated with me on the veranda of the Grand Hotel, waiting to take the train north to the Pietersburg terminal. We sat smoking our calabashes, and enjoying the fine view of the Pretoria Kerkplein. And then suddenly the young New Yorker burst in upon us with his Sacred Crocodile.

It was the first time I had seen Chuck White since his arrival in Durban three months before. I was not surprised at this new prank of his. Always of a reckless, devil-may-care nature, the same sharp-nosed,



keen-eyed youngster I had known in the States, he was wild in Durban. Didn't know when he would settle down to business, wanted to go out and eat lions, or have the lions eat him. A girl in it—yes, there was. Met her on the boat, he said. He admitted he was a goner—she must have been a peach, small, peppy, black-eyed thing. But her dad was a stickler for decorum, or something, and kept a weather eye on her; perhaps he had ambitions for her, among the officialdom. Anyway, Chuck was wild.

He had acquired a cream-color Tussore silk suit and a helmet, which almost hid his bristling, alert features, and when he burst in upon us in Pretoria, he was a picture of the Lion-Taming Kid.

"Lions?" he scoffed. "Nix, I won't join you. I crave real excitement. And you're going with me, Jim Bagley! Now listen!" His slim legs carried him nervously to and fro. I had never seen him when he wasn't tearing about, spirited, on the go. Now he was worse, as he told about the black man he had picked up about the mines. I cast doubt on the Zulu's word, for effect. "Umjala a liar?" He laughed derisively. "I've knocked about a bit and I know a fairy tale when I hear one! He's telling me straight enough—spilled a lot of dope about the big blue diamond the tribesmen cached in the Sacred Pool." He gestured impatiently.

"Oh, I know it sounds phony. But I've nosed around for a month checking up his tale and the 'lost diamond of Chaka' legend. I'm banking on Umjala. You've got to go, Jim. Got to!"

Well, the thing fascinated me from the start, though I was not ready to confess it to my Boer hunting companions. Liking the lion game as I did, I was not averse to any other exciting hunt that promised a thrill. In that receptive state I heard Chuck's story and he won. I was converted to crocodiles, and particularly to the huge fiend of the blackwater of the bosveld. Besides, there was a diamond in it!

He wound up his tale with the announcement that he had Umjala the Zulu with him at that moment. The black, he said, was ready to lead us to the sacred beast immediately, and that clinched the argument.

VAN DER MERWE, his bronzed features growing whimsical, and Prinsloo, smoking placidly, a twinkle in his gray-brown eyes, listened throughout. I asked them if they would as soon hunt a crocodile.

"Certainly!" assented Van der Merwe, and Prinsloo nodded his immense head. You cannot easily stampede these Boers, they have the Dutch phlegm!

So it was settled. Fortunately little change in arrangements was necessary. Chuck had come on to Pretoria well equipped, with his inseparable flivver, expecting to overtake us and win us over in just the way he had done. But instead of trekking to Pietersburg due north, for lions, we were soon rushing by train toward Natal, straight to the southeast, without Chuck and the Zulu. They took the flivver.

They arrived at Pietermaritzburg an hour behind us, and then we found Chuck had a pair of blacks. "I've got another Zulu friend with me," grinned the youngster. "His name is 'Breakfast'."

Breakfast, a lad of sixteen, formerly a driller's helper on the East Rand, had none of the hang-dog look of the usual black. He was to play an important part in the crocodile chase.

Van der Merwe's Basuto boys squatted on their blankets about the little Pietermaritzburg platform, chatting and laughing in usual good spirits.

"They feel good, Boss!" explained the Hottentot Jan, our driver. "That medicine man," indicating a shriveled passing native, "throw the ox-bones and they say good luck for our trek."

Close to a dense thicket stood the three fine cape-carts Prinsloo had wired ahead to have ready. Each was inspanned with two mules, the high wheels glistening with new black paint against the snow-white hoods of the outfit.

Prinsloo gazed on the equipment with placid elation. "Now," he murmured, "we are true sportsmen. Everything spick and span. The mules, they are every one *gesoute*, inoculated against the deadly tsetse fly."

"Yeah," chuckled the New Yorker, gesturing toward the flivver by the roadside. "My outfit's gesoot too, loaded with extra gas and oil. Let's eat!"

We whites invaded the hotel, while the serving boys set to from the pack outfit. I had been struck by the feeling of caste even among the blacks. Umjala and the Zulu boy Breakfast were sitting well apart from the Basutos, whom they affected not to notice. The Zulu is the aristocrat of the natives, yielding not even to the whites in a certain innate dignity.

Umjala was a striking example of Zulu hauteur. When Chuck first trotted him out he was dressed as any other "mine nigger," barefoot, in a pair of worn pants, shirt open at the throat, and battered felt hat on his head. Yet, somehow, he looked quite different from the other natives. Tall, middle-aged, of rather saturnine features, he was a giant, though very slender about the waist. But it was in his bearing that he was distinctive. He might have been a chieftain.

"Come along, you fellows!" Prinsloo called, and we lost no time, stopping only for farewells after dinner at the Maritz hotel. The Basutos, after *mealie*, meal and meat, with much sweetened coffee, had loaded our tents, provisions and weapons into the rear of the cape-carts.

Chuck was giving the flivver a final going-over. I ambled toward him, away from the rest. "What became of the young lady?" I asked easily, knowing he had counted me his only confidant.

He dropped the pliers he was using, picked them up, laughed somewhat bitterly. "She and her dad went on a lion hunt with some big fish in the government service—guy named Bertram, secretary of transportation or some damn thing. They're over in the Umvoti country now." He spun the crank.

"H-m." That was news. I wondered if this trip of ours to the Umvoti might have been influenced by that fact. Chuck declared vehemently it was not. He bounded into the flivver seat, raining a shower of pennies on the band of naked urchins about the station.

"Let's go!" he shouted, in sudden new glee, laughing like a schoolboy in anticipation of a great lark.

To the roar of the engine and the crack of rawhide whips we were off, the mules urged to their utmost by the shrill cries of Hottentot Jan.

If I was a bit skeptical about the Sacred Crocodile hunt, now that Chuck had revealed the presence of a feminine lure on the Umvoti, it was not for long. Prinsloo, the veteran Boer, was taking the expedition very seriously.

"You think there is something in it—diamond and all?" I asked him, to reassure myself.

He nodded solemnly, as the cape-cart

rolled forward in the wake of the automobile. I had already heard, of course, the legend of the big blue stone of King Chaka, "the Black Napoleon," and how the diamond had dropped from sight on the defeat of the Zulus.

"Chaka's diamond sounds like a fairy tale," I prompted the Boer, "like the gems of our American Cities of Cibola."

"There is no doubt of the stone," returned Prinsloo, amid rings of pipe smoke. "The big gem is a matter of South African history. The Zulu king Dingaan on his defeat by the whites offered the famous diamond to Commandant Pretorius in exchange for captured tribesmen. Dingaan's offer was refused and his kraal was burned to the ground. Dingaan escaped with the stone."

The caravan wound in and out among the sheep bushes, flushing an occasional springbok. The usual vultures hung immovable overhead, keeping eternal watch over the veld. If the hard-headed Boer believed in the diamond, I was satisfied.

"But the crocodile, what's the connection?" I wanted to know.

Prinsloo did not smile. "My grandfather was a commandant in the great Boer trek, when King Chaka waged bloody warfare. A devil, that savage. But we respected the Zulus as great warriors. They're not real niggers, they're partly Arabian. Chaka was a real 'Black Napoleon,' first of the savages to organize his men into regimental form, each *impi* of two thousand men commanded by an *Induna*, or military chief." He knocked the ashes from his pipe, refilled it.

"Chaka cleaned up Natal. His brother Dingaan met the Boers at the battle of Blood River, where gunpowder turned the tide. There the whites first saw the big blue diamond." His sonorous, monotonous voice droned on tranquilly.

"The stone then dropped from sight. When the Zulus rose under Cetewayo, in '79, the British defeated them. But the whole British army was unable to find the missing diamond. There was a reason." He nodded toward the tall, grotesque-looking Zulu Umjala perched high on the pack in Chuck's flivver. "I believe your friend White, through that big black boy, has stumbled upon the secret."

"Crocodile?" I laughed.

The Boer nodded, his invariable manner of affirmation. "We'll learn more when we talk with him in camp." He had said more than was his wont and I did not press him further.

It was our intention to make a good twenty miles before sunset, but the sheep bushes held back the carts, and Chuck did not leave us behind. We fell several miles short of our goal and as the shadows lengthened we reached a little clearing where we decided to make camp. While the Basutos raised the tents, Prinsloo talked a while with the big Zulu. We had supper, and I drew aside with Chuck and the two Boers. The young salesman, though in good spirits, did not enlighten us further about the Sacred Crocodile, and sought his blankets early.

It had grown dark and chill in the open space where we had made camp, a level stretch surrounded by clumps of trees and "wait-a-bit" bushes. Van der Merwe and the Basutos had followed Chuck to bed. The two Zulus sat apart from us, smoking vile black tobacco out of small-bowl Karroo pipes. I noted that Umjala was very wide awake; his dark eyes were glistening; I believe he was trying to hear all that was said.

Prinsloo had something on his mind—I guessed crocodiles and diamonds! He began to talk of Zulus, a wonderful, a superior race of primitive men, he insisted. At his gesture toward Umjala I ordered both of the Zulus to their blankets. The Boer spoke in low earnestness.

"I was right. The young American has blundered upon the secret of the bosveld. If we succeed in bagging the Sacred Crocodile, we shall have the largest diamond in South Africa."

"Sounds mighty interesting. Chuck promised me as much. But *how?*"

The Boer puffed a while in silence in the glare of the red embers, then: "The Zulu worships the crocodile, the thing he most fears. Little wonder. The croc is a dangerous fiend, a constant menace, a terrible and treacherous foe the native seeks to appease by worship. Your Zulu's dread of the crocodile is inbred; from time immemorial the beast has eaten black boys, and men. Little wonder that the native attributes to the water-dragon the personality of the Evil One." Prinsloo's broad honest face, strangely mellowed in the firelight, betrayed none of the dark thoughts his well-chosen words were painting for me.

As he paused, all was still around us, the immense silence of the limitless veld. I had read somewhere of the black magic that led to human sacrifices to appease the spirit of the Sacred Crocodile; that it was only after the British had wiped out the warriors of Cetewayo that the sacrifice of infants to the Beast of the Bosveld had ceased. Babies had been fed to the monster until 1879. The Boer explained it now:

"The Zulu believes the spirit of Chaka, the monstrous Nero of the race, dwells in the captive crocodile of the Umvoti backwater. The sacrifices were offered to Chaka."

"But the diamond?"

The Boer refilled his calabash. Although the Southern Cross stood above us in all its glory, the darkness of the landscape was impenetrable. Prinsloo gestured beyond the firelight to the tent occupied by the big Zulu.

"Umjala has a history. A common menial of the Witwatersrand now, yet he was once a great *Induna* with his people, a royal chieftain, cousin of King Cetewayo. How he became civilized, and remained in exile for eighteen years, up to this time, is a story in itself. Umjala was left for dead after the battle of Rorke's Drift. The British carried him off the field, finding a spark of life. He was taken to the home of a surgeon, a Scotsman, nursed back to health and became a servant of his savior, taught both the Taal and some English, and made into what he is today. When the surgeon died, Umjala went to work in the mines, preferring civilization to savagery. He has carried about with him the secret of the big blue diamond all these years."

"Ah, the diamond! Chuck was right, then—but how does the crocodile—?"

Prinsloo's placid features registered a smile. He had an exasperating way of beating about the bush; he reverted back to the baby sacrifices to the Beast of the Bosveld; told of two infants, twins, one of which must be offered up. At last he got around to the big fact.

"And then, driven to desperation by the pursuing whites, they embedded the big blue stone in the living hide of the Sacred Crocodile, the one safe hiding place. The *Indunas* laced it into the leather armor with rawhide, and if Umjala is right, it is there today. I think we had better get some sleep."

WHEN we had covered the fire and sought our beds I could not close my lids in sleep. Lying in my tent, listening to the occasional noises of our mules outspanned with the cape-carts, I could not drive from mind the horrors of Zululand when mothers offered up their young to the belly of the Beast of the Bosveld. The account given by the Boer of the twins had been particularly dramatic.

Unswerving in the hard fate outlined for her by the king himself, Queen Nomazolo went to the Sacred Pool to offer up one of her baby boys. Even a prospective prince was not immune, so great a hold had the superstition of the sacrifice obtained in Zululand. About the neck of the chosen twin that the mother must offer up to the spirit of Chaka was the royal talisman, the great band of gold reserved only for the living prince. That ring would make the lost baby a prince in heaven; the living boy would be a prince on earth; hence both would be princes and ultimately kings, due to the mother's ingenuity. Tossing the victim into the Sacred Pool, Nomazolo buried her face in her hands and ran screaming from the scene. It was the morning of the last battle, and the whites emerged from the bush, lifted the infant unharmed from the stream, and took the boy with them to Durban.

At last sleep closed my eyes, and when the rattle of the pans in the hands of the Basuto kitchen boys awoke me in the chill of morning, I was eager to hunt the Sacred Crocodile and the diamond laced in his hide by the *Indunas* of the past generation.

We set to work vigorously, all lending a hand stacking and loading the tents, watering the mules, and preparing for breakfast. Before the sun had climbed the rim of the distant koppies we were off. Chuck, lighthearted and full of fun as ever, took the lead in his flivver, guided by Umjala.

It was still midmorning when we reached the Umvoti River, but we did not intend to stop until noon. Here was the boundary of Zululand, and Chuck announced that "Umjala would boss the show." We were entering the domain of the people of his race, and the Zulu was willingly accorded the leadership, even by Van der Merwe and Prinsloo.

On the banks of the stream we left our conveyances long enough to find the most favorable spot for fording, as well as to stretch our legs. Before we could make preparations for the crossing, a pair of cape-carts emerged from the bush below us, on our side of the river. Two sun-burned white men in helmets were in the forward cart, rifles in hand, and they motioned to us excitedly as they drew near.

"You had better turn back!" called out one, a slim, short individual with deep-set burning eyes. "Our Zulu guide left us and we abandoned our lion hunt." He motioned with his pipe stem across the river. "We just came over. King Dinizulu is up to mischief, planning a rising. We hunted for two days—"

Chuck White turned on him quickly. "You hear anything of another party over there?" he demanded.

"Just what I was going to say. We hunted for them for two days, had to give it up when our Basutos refused to stay longer. We were surrounded once by the black spies, and questioned. My companion is in the government service. It's the only thing that saved us. Dinizulu's not ready yet to have the government of Natal on his back, but—"

"Is there a young woman in that party you speak of—two whites and a girl?" shot out the young flivver salesman.

"They're the ones; we met them the first day, then separated. I advise you to turn back—notify the government to send a force. That's what we are going to do."

Chuck White smiled grimly, turned from one to the other of us as the lion-hunters turned their animals southward. "We won't turn back," he said, easily. "Eh, Umjala?"

The black's eyes were serious; he muttered something in Zulu and his lips closed tightly.

Prinsloo and Van der Merwe shook their heads, exchanged looks and gazed frowningly across the river. Prinsloo framed a question in the Zulu tongue, addressing Umjala. The black immediately spoke in the melodious cadences of his mother speech, a concession to his present leadership.

"The country beyond the Umvoti has been quiet," he said, while Prinsloo interpreted phrase by phrase. "But the king of the Zulu nation, the crafty and murderous Dinizulu, son of Cetewayo, is no friend of the whites. What these messengers have said is not surprising. Rumors have come to me at the Rand that Dinizulu, working in the dark, is only biding his time for another uprising. It may be here. But your servant will lead you, if you wish."

"Sure!" grunted Chuck. "No question of turning back in this man's party! We've got to find that other crowd, first thing. Let's move!"

I saw that Van der Merwe and Prinsloo were in no hurry to move—they had encountered Zulu treachery before. But the placid Boer interpreter gave voice to his thoughts after a moment's reflection.

"If it was merely the crocodile hunt, I would be in favor of giving it up," he said solemnly. "But of course we have the other party of lion hunters to think of. We will do what the majority decides."

"Hell, we're the majority, and we've already decided," flung out Chuck, and his sharp eyes snapped. "Come on!"

THE big black raised himself to his full height and uttered haughty if melodious words, which Prinsloo repeated: "We are going into the land of enemies. You will be safe only if you follow the guidance of your great *Induna*, Umjala the Zulu." He turned to the Basutos and ordered them to rearrange the provision packs higher in the back of the carts. Chuck and one of the serving boys strapped down the oil and gasoline cans. Like all South African rivers, the Umvoti was a succession of shallows alternating with holes of immense depth. At this point was a drift, much patronized by Zulu wayfarers. The river was low at this time of the year and we were glad we had not come later, when the Umvoti would have been booming with the floods that sweep to the Indian Ocean.

All of us but Chuck and the three cart drivers made ready to wade the stream. Some of the Basuto boys dug from the packs in the carts a pair of empty petroleum cans used for boiling water in camp, which roused my curiosity. Chuck strode forward, puffing vigorously on his Sumatra cigar.

"You all heard Umjala's little speech," he said, in quick, subdued tones. "I want to add a word, a tip Umjala just slipped me.

"First of everything, we must let out not a syllable that we know even the existence of the blamed Beast of the Bosveld. If the Zulus get a hunch that we're onto the blue diamond—zowie—we might as well jump in the creek right now. If our game leaks, it'll cause panic among the tribes and inflame the blacks. Umjala says every kopje would be red with their signal fires, calling the tribesmen, and these birds would defend the Sacred Croc to the last woman and child of them. Mum's the word, for Umjala swears the leaves of the trees have ears in this man's country. All set?" He mounted the flivver seat.

The Umvoti was the first crocodile *spruit* I had seen in Africa, and the purpose of the petroleum cans was soon made plain. The Basutos had cut stout sticks of ironwood, and Umjala motioned to two of them to lead the way into the stream.

The natives began to beat the sticks on the empty cans, making a din that must have been heard far in the deep quiet of the bosveld. Chuck pushed back the throttle and yelled for them to stop it. "Why tell the whole country we're on the way?" he demanded.

"That's all right," grinned Van der Merwe. "If they hear it, they'll think it's only friendly tribesmen."

"But what's the big idea?"

"You couldn't get a black to cross without scaring the crocs that way," laughed Prinsloo. "Or a white man either—that knows the man-eaters." Chuck looked at Umjala, who nodded assent a little impatiently. The engine rattled, and trailed the two Basutos with the cans.

A cape-cart followed. We waded behind. Then came the other natives and the two remaining carts. During the crossing the Basutos kept up their terrific racket, beating on the cans with all their strength; yet they were timid and cast apprehensive glances toward the water.

The Boers also kept a sharp lookout on the river, holding their rifles in readiness. When we had got over the *spruit*, Prinsloo showed me he had been prepared with explosive bullets.

"The only really vulnerable spot of the croc is the eye," he declared, seriously. "The monsters are covered with a horny shield tough as metal. The din won't always drive them away, either. When I was a boy the hungry man-eaters attacked our convoy on a drift, killing and crippling the draught oxen."

"Whew! No wonder the natives are scared of 'em," grunted Chuck. "Well, we don't want these babies. Remember, from now on, mum's the word!"

I could understand the fear and loathing in which the giant reptile is held by the natives, for his great size and strength and bloodthirsty ferociousness are such as to command the respect of well-equipped big game hunters. Our own alligator of the Everglades is indeed an inoffensive kitten compared with the *kaaiman* of South Africa.

Here, on the edge of Zululand, there seemed to be no trace of humans. Luckily for our peace of mind we did not know that keen eyes and ears had been seeing and listening from the time we left the returning lion hunters.

Chuck, Umjala and the two Boers held a conference, at which I was a mere auditor. "What direction would Bertram take the Wilburs?" the salesman wanted to know.

It was agreed they would not have gone far into Zululand; they must still be close to the river in spite of the failure of the other party to relocate them. If that was the case, Umjala's original route would serve as well as any to hunt the three whites and their Basutos.

"The girl must have a lot of spunk to go out hunting lions," I remarked to Chuck.

"She has. She's that kind. She's a world traveler, a sportswoman, athletic, full of vim and go. They couldn't have held her. She's tiny, but a different kind of girl. Independent, but not a flapper! On the boat I know she liked me, to talk to, anyway, till her dad stopped her, locked her up practically, dogged her steps every minute. She's a real girl. She's—" He choked up, glared at me foolishly.

"Her name's Wilbur? Where from?"

"Seattle, but she's traveled everywhere. Elsie Wilbur. Jim, we've got to find her, right off. That blamed fool Englishman should have known better than to bring those two babes-in-the-wood here at a time like this, alone." He chewed viciously on his cigar.

I smiled. "They had a big party of native hunters and a Zulu guide. Bertram couldn't be expected to know about this threatened rising," I added, baitingly.

"Dang his hide, I guess he couldn't." He strode off; the natives had rearranged the packs to ride lower in the carts. To the snap of whips and the rattle of the engine we were off. The ground was higher on the Zulu side, dusty and sandy in spots. Our course lay where the brush timber was heaviest.

When we outspanned for the noonday meal eight miles from the drift, we knew we were not far from a kraal. At the spot picked for camp we found plucked korhaan feathers and a bit of broken clay earthenware, which told us the Zulus were in the habit of frequenting the site.

"Look here!" Chuck had seized from the hand of Breakfast a small green cardboard box which the native had picked up. "We're on a warm trail!"

It was an empty container for sixpenceworth of English cigarets. Prinsloo examined it. "The box is fresh, not soiled with many nights of dew."

"And the party we met didn't come this way!" Chuck was excited. "We'll eat in a jiffy, and go!"

AFTER a hasty meal we started for the lower reaches of the river, the favored region of both the crocodile and the lion.

Umjala told us that we were now within the neighborhood of scattering Zulu kraals and might come upon the villages at any time but for his own effort to avoid them. The country itself was old to him, yet in eighteen years there had undoubtedly been some changes. None of us whites had mentioned the diamond-bearing Beast of the Bosveld since crossing the drift. We were hunting lions and nothing else, as Chuck had cautioned us. Lions—and the Wilbur party.

A mile farther downstream we ran into our first Zulus. An aged man and a comely young girl were sighted on the trail and we made no effort to avoid them. They were gathering *stam vruchte*, a juicy fruit which grows on a curious shrub without leaves. The oblong red objects seemed to be hanging on a sawed-off log. As we drew near, Umjala and Breakfast doubled up and knelt down between the seats of flivver and cape-cart, determined that they should not be seen.

Questioning of the man and girl by Prinsloo brought out a fact that astonished us—the natives knew of our coming.

This worried us, revealing that we were under an invisible surveillance. "Ask them if they saw the Wilburs," Chuck directed the Boer.

No, they had not, or at least so they declared. I was wondering if any of our blue diamond talk had been overheard, for many of the natives understood English. The girl said something that partly allayed our fears:

"The *Inkosis*," meaning us, "will find good lion hunting in a few hours' journey," she said, showing her white teeth and stretching a well-rounded arm in the direction we were going.

We did not know how diabolically contrived was this remark, to throw us off the track. The girl and her grandfather had come from a neighboring kraal. They seemed peaceable enough and were excellent decoys to keep us moving toward the stronghold of Dinizulu.

They were right, so far as the game was concerned. By middle afternoon we had come to the flat, sandy reaches of the river, where the Umvoti had degenerated into a series of deep, black pools. Chuck, in the dust-whitened car, was leading as usual. Prinsloo and I were riding together, and the Boer's rifle rested across his knee. Suddenly, without sound, a tawny object hurtled from the trailside and cut an arc across the touring car, landing in the brush on the opposite side. Prinsloo and Van der Merwe fired where the brush crackled. We dismounted and hunted over the spot, without success, while Chuck stared.

"What in blazes was that?" he wanted to know.

"A young lady lion," grinned Van der Merwe. "Asleep by the roadside, likely, and got awake, in a daze at the sound of your automobile, and jumped blindly." We climbed back and the journey was resumed, for we had no time to stalk the beast.

"I'm coming back some day," affirmed Chuck, "to hunt lions by auto. I'll sell a car to every hunter in Durban on the strength of this!"

"Might have happened with a cape-cart," laughed Van der Merwe. "The lioness was more scared than we were."

"The critter missed me by a foot. Lord, if I'd only had a picture of it. No matter, I've got witnesses." The auto salesman spurted ahead again.

Our trail had become a path in heavy white sand. At one spot the car's rear wheels churned in to the hub and spun wildly, sinking deeper. Chuck, grumbling lustily, got out, and a dozen hands pushed the machine ahead, clearing the hole. "You've got witnesses to that, too," remarked Prinsloo, eyes twinkling.

"You don't expect me to tell 'em *that*," grinned Chuck. We were off again, on better ground. Pools of the Umvoti glistened in the sun, to drop here and there beneath the sand. Suddenly Chuck halted with a jerk. "We're following cart tracks!" he shouted.

"Have you just found that out?" Prinsloo smiled back at Van der Merwe. "Yes, we're on your friends' trail—close."

The wind had sifted the sand, covering the road in most places, explaining why such inexperienced trackers as Chuck and I were had not noted the fact before. The little Yankee let out a whoop of joy and drove recklessly ahead.

The sand deepened. Again the flivver stuck and was pushed out. We had got seated when there was a fresh interruption from Jan the Hottentot, crying excitedly and pointing to a dark object in the distance traveling over the dry bed of the river.

Instantly the Basutos were out of the carts. Chuck's yells of impatience did not halt them. Umjala and Breakfast were in the van of the blacks.

"You might as well let 'em go, no matter what the hurry. Now you'll see some real native sport," murmured Prinsloo, smiling and nodding his head as if he too were enjoying the prospect.

Winding slowly around the granite boulders, the object finally came plainly into view, awkwardly crawling.

"A croc, twenty feet long if he's a foot!" Chuck leaped from the flivver. The blacks were feverishly hacking at a sapling on the bank of the river. They worked with great fury, and in a twinkling had felled the young tree, stripped the limbs, and were running toward the river with the long heavy pole. Leaving the Hottentot to manage the cape-carts we hurried after them.

The crocodile had by now almost covered the dry stretch and was nearing a deep hole. Shouting and screaming, the natives halted some thirty feet in front of the huge reptile to cut it off from the water.

The monster came to a stop, opened its immense jaws, and hissed for all the world like an infuriated snake, in volume equaling a pair of powerful bellows. Lashing its tail over the boulder-strewn ground, the creature resumed its advance. The blacks jumped nimbly aside, and then suddenly stepped close to the reptile's right side. In view of their fear of the beasts, they showed rare courage, but they knew their game.

The crocodile slowly and clumsily tried to swing around and face his tormentors, and in so doing raised himself on his tripod-like legs.

This was the chance the natives had waited for. With cool swiftness, before the snapping jaws or the lashing tail could reach them, they had thrust the end of the heavy pole under the reptile. There was a powerful, dextrous twist, and over went the crocodile, flat on his back.

Almost the same instant there was a glint of spears, and the steel points of the assegais flashed forward, to be buried deep in the soft flesh of the monster's underbody.

Now followed a scene such as can be witnessed only in the land of the *kaaiman*. The beast roared and bellowed in his terrible death struggle, sending cold chills down my spine, lashing the ground with his immense muscular tail, sending sand, earth and stones in all directions. Again and again flashed the Zulu spears, now dripping red, as the natives literally dug out the flesh of their quivering enemy. All the while the Basutos shouted like children in an exciting game, and the Zulus, though silent, plied their assegais until the great tail lashed no more.

They had at last got the dreaded croc out of his element and had taken a swift revenge.

Leaving the carcass lying in the sun for the red ants, the boys climbed back up the riverbank, wiping the blades of their spears in the grass. The blacks would have been delighted to stay here for the remainder of the day, hiding out in the *bos* in the hope that more crocodiles would open themselves to easy attack, for this was their favorite method of killing them. But Chuck sent them flying back to the carts.

"Great stuff!" he admitted, yanking the crank. "I'm coming back here, too. But we've got another job first!"

Sundown brought us to the more heavily wooded region, without overtaking the hunters we sought. We pushed on until twilight dimmed the infrequent wheel tracks we were following, prepared camp, and Chuck and I took our rifles on a chance shot in the dusk for some fresh meat, for we were in great springbok and blesbok country. Umjala halted us.

"We deep in home of the *Ama Zoolah*, people of the Zulus, *Inkoos!*" he said in English. "We not shoot. Zulus know we here, but maybe not in this spot. In the morning find your white friends!"

"You're the doctor. We must be right on their heels. After a bit we'll scout around—might find their campfire." Chuck scanned the fading landscape. "They can't be far—!"

He cut off short. Every ear had heard the sharp report of a high-power rifle, not a hundred yards away in the low timber. Umjala motioned. "White men!"

The four of us bolted forward. We heard the excited jabbering of blacks, and as we reached the foot of a flat rock we saw the natives clambering up. A tall figure in helmet leaned beside the rock.

"Bravo, Miss Elsie! You got Mr. Leo handsomely! A capital shot!"

A slip of a girl was moving forward from the brush in the faint twilight, her rifle held at an easy angle in her right forearm.

CHUCK WHITE was at my elbow. He did not run forward to make his identity known and renew the friendship begun with the young woman on the boat; instead, he stood gazing on the scene. I imagined his eyes were filled with an eloquent, idolatrous worship of the youthful American Diana. She seemed worthy of it; the faint light did not hide the piquant, almost flashing beauty of a face crowned by lustrous dark hair visible beneath her white helmet. Slender yet not without curves, her carriage revealed the woman in spite of mannish khaki breeches and high lace shoes. Abruptly she halted, seeing Prinsloo and Van der Merwe moving toward the rock.

On the instant, the brush crackled behind the girl, and a short, stout figure lumbered out, puffing and mopping his brow. "Wouldn't have believed it, if I hadn't seen it! Heavens, now I hope you're satisfied!"

"It's her dad," whispered Chuck, awed.

"Soon's we get that skin, we'll beat it back to Durban. Gosh, Pet, I never was so scared in my life! Proud of you, confound it. But enough's enough." He halted, stared. "Who in mischief's coming now!"

"Friends," announced Prinsloo, placidly. "Mr. White's expedition. We have been trailing you."

"What in thunder you trailing us for?" grunted Wilbur, a frown on his florid [illegible] The tall figure on the rock was calling to Elsie to climb up and view her quarry. She turned her head, as I joined the Boers, followed by Chuck. Heedless of company at such an exciting moment, the Seattle man (an exporter of large interests we soon learned him to be) turned and puffed his way up the ledge. Elsie Wilbur seemed the least concerned over her surprising feat as a big game hunter. As Chuck drew nearer she bounded forward with outstretched hand.

"So you are the Mr. White! Your expedition?" She paused, baffled. "Why did you trail us? I'm so glad, but—is anything wrong?"

"Not much," stammered Chuck. "Not much, only we were going through. Thought we would tell you to go back." His careless effrontery was gone. "You—you shot that lion? I mean, I know you shot him! You're a wonder, a—!"

"An accident! And other guns were on him, if I had missed." She laughed merrily. "But what in the world are *you* doing here?"

"Hunting crocodiles. Just going through. Heard you were here—"

"Oh, fine! We'll all join you!"

"Meet Miss Wilbur." Chuck named us. "Yes, we heard you were here, from that other hunting party." He floundered about, hedging, and plainly did not want to alarm her. "I'll want to see your father—"

"Hey, Pet! Why'n mischief don't you come here—the biggest he-lion I ever saw, a mane on him like a—like a—" He didn't find the word, but came sliding and stumbling down the ledge. Bertram the Englishman was with him. Beneath the rock the exporter stopped, stared, and let out an explosive, disgusted word, shaking a pudgy fist at Chuck:

"*You!*"

"Yep, me!" The kid salesman was himself again. "You come here, Mr. Wilbur, I want to talk with you!" He collared the pudgy, protesting capitalist, drew him aside. For a time he talked in a low, earnest undertone, while the tall, slim Englishman Bertram addressed the three of us in calm dignity, wanting to know "what all this bally business was about?"

"Only a little Zulu scare," droned the slow-witted Van der Merwe. "We hope it is nothing."

"Where is your camp?" I asked the girl, to change the subject.

"Just a few yards ahead. A Zulu scare? That sounds interesting! This is great!" She turned, ran lightly toward the ledge. "Oh, Teddy White, come up and see my lion when you get through with dad and that Zulu scare! It'll be dark if you don't hurry." She climbed nimbly among the Basuto boys where the big cat had fallen.

"Good heavens!" Jonathan Wilbur stamped toward us. "Zulus on the warpath! Ho, Pet! Let the blamed lion go! We gotta get out of this, quick! We'll be butchered, chopped into mincemeat! Zulu devils got us surrounded—hey, Pet—!"

"Damned nonsense!" Chuck flourished his fist. "Now, lookee here, Mr. Wilbur, don't be a fool! No such thing." He stared toward the girl on the rock, whence came a gleeful little exclamation. "We're not surrounded. Nobody said the Zulus were on the warpath, or anything about being butchered. We're not surrounded—"

"Bally rot, all of it," drawled the Englishman. "Take a government man's word for it."

"Sure!" assented Chuck. There was a scramble from the rock; the Basuto boys were coming down, jabbering in excited alarm. They had heard enough. Elsie Wilbur, unheeded, was calling to them to come back and carry the carcass to camp. Behind us a tall form glided from the darkening brush.

"Umjala, come here!" Chuck motioned the big Zulu forward. "Tell these fool people there's no uprising, and we're not surrounded!"

The superb, athletic figure was dumb. "Go on, tell 'em!" insisted the young American. Umjala spoke in his native tongue. Prinsloo repeated the words:

"It would be better to remain here for the night, *Inkoos*. If we try to hurry we will be in real danger. Flight will give our enemies courage. Better to wait till morning and then try to withdraw leisurely, *Inkoos*."

"Great Scott!" Jonathan Wilbur waved his arms. "Worse than I thought! Worse and more of it! Hey, you, White, bring her down out of that—that's right—up there in the dark, and even the darkies scared stiff! Lord, now it's all plain—why that big guide of ours dug out this morning! What in thunder'll we do, if we don't dare get out of this hole—stick here and let 'em pick our bones!"

"Nonsense, old chap," droned Bertram. "Ridiculous. The niggers won't dare raise a hand—a representative of the queen's government with you, and all that! I'll look after Miss Elsie." His long legs took the rocky slope; Chuck and Elsie were coming down. "Bravo, Miss Elsie! Jolly well, I knew you'd get your lion—"

"Oh, isn't this interesting!" Darkness had fallen, but we knew from the girl globe-trotter's tone that her face was beaming with the zest of a peril greater than lion hunting—knew also she had no comprehension of the real danger that lay in the fact that she was a white woman—a young and very comely woman.

"You say your black guide left you this morning?" queried Van der Merwe, slowly, as the Seattle exporter paced back and forth, chewing a dead cigar. This had happened with the other party.

"Yeah, sneaked off, the son-of-a-gun. I bet a hat he was one of these Zulu devils. Dang their fool hides anyway. What they want to start anything right when we were in among the big game? Looks like we were up against it for fair, now. By jingoes, I've read how the black devils—"

"Shut up!" bawled out Chuck. If he had wanted to win over the old man's friendship for Elsie's sake, it looked as though he were taking a strange way of doing it. But I was surprised at the capitalist's come-back:

"Say, Ted, how'n the mischief are we going to engineer this thing now, anyway?"

Chuck (Theodore and Ted to those who had not known him as long as I had) talked for a time with Umjala and the two Boer veterans. It was decided to unite the two camps into one and to remain for the night, as though we were unsuspecting lion hunters. The frightened Basutos, hovering near, were set to work.

"Hanged if I'll sleep a wink," affirmed Jonathan Wilbur, proffering Chuck a cigar. And he didn't.

OUR cape-carts and the flivver were brought up to the site of the Wilbur camp, in an open space near clear, fresh spring water. As the touring car bucked its way up to the campfire, the pudgy exporter's eyes popped.

"God, a Lizzie!" he exclaimed. "A Lizzie in Zululand!"

"Yeah, a Lizzie," snapped Chuck, hopping out. "I'll sell her for five thousand, American money."

"Taken. The danged thing might save our lives yet."

"She's not for sale—yet," grunted the other, and he meant it.

We had not eaten, although the Basuto boys had been preparing our supper when the rifle shot had sent us away from our first camp. Neither had our new companions. Bertram had shot a blesbok, and our combined party feasted of the fresh roasted meat and *mealie* meal, washed down with coffee. By way of after-dinner liqueur we had some very good *Kaapse* dop, aged in the barrel, of which Elsie alone did not partake.

The mules were knee-haltered and our campfire extinguished. For a time we visited, and our talk veered about to Zulus as rapidly as diverted elsewhere. There was no further hiding all the facts from Elsie Wilbur; she wanted to know full particulars; Chuck and Bertram vied in belittling the danger; but she read her father's attitude like a book. Although she showed no alarm, she was a bit more serious than when the subject was first mentioned.

"I'd love to be able to say we were attacked by savages!" she declared. "But of course I wouldn't want any one to be speared!"

"Not a possibility of danger," affirmed the Englishman. "On my account—it's my *position* that will jolly well spoil their game."

"I wish to thunder I believed it," grunted Wilbur, "but I'd rather lean on Chuck's flivver. Come on, Pet, we'll need our sleep!"

We moved over to our own tent, and for a time sat on our blankets smoking, hoping to drive away the giant mosquitoes, which made the young American cuss audibly. Outside the natives were muttering in low tones as they worked in the darkness finishing up the salt-and-alum rubbing over the stretched lion skin, for Elsie had had her way in ordering the trophy preserved.

Bertram had joined us; our appraisal of him was that he wasn't a bad sort, cool, an excellent hunter, and not at all ignorant of the habits of the Zulus. That the Englishman was a worthy rival for the favor of the witching brunette, Chuck seemed to realize. Striking in appearance, he was rather handome save for a prominent nose. Undoubtedly he believed that his official position as a sub-secretary in the Natal government would see him and the party through any difficulty, for the Zulus feared the British officialdom.

"By Jove, it won't be necessary for you to abandon your own trip to go back with us," he insisted to Chuck.

"We'll go back," muttered the American. "At least far enough to see that the woman of the party is safe."

"Good of you. I say, one of you asked about our Zulu guide deserting us. That mightn't mean a thing."

"No?" queried Prinsloo quietly. "But that other party had the same experience. Our Zulu guide is loyal; he thinks differently."

The bulky form of Jonathan Wilbur pushed through the tent opening. "Got her to sleep—just like a baby—less'n two minutes," declared the exporter, lighting a cigar. "By jingoes, that's what a clear conscience does. I'll not get a wink tonight—" He cut off, chuckled. "Too blamed much excitement. Now what's it all look like, boys?"

"We'll go back with you, beyond the Umvoti," informed Chuck. "Then we've got a little job—" He desisted, at a warning guttural note from Van der Merwe.

Abruptly it seemed as though the night had become less dark, for a faint glow penetrated even through the canvas of our tent.

There was a movement among the natives as of alarm, and quickly the six of us drew from the covering into the clearing.

The flares of two fires were shooting high into the air on a near-by koppie. I felt Prinsloo's huge hand on my shoulder.

"*Brandwacht* fires!" he muttered. "That is bad—bad!"

Umjala, as one transfixed, was standing ten feet away in the faint glow, watching the beacons, saying not a word. Prinsloo growled again.

"Often have those fires forewarned death to peaceable whites." A voice interrupted him.

"Some fireworks!" It was Chuck.

"That first is less than a mile off. Suppose we go have a look at it," the salesman added. Our Basuto boys had vanished, cowering in their tent. Prinsloo surprised us by replying:

"Not such a bad idea, if Umjala will direct us. We can see into the firelight while hidden in the darkness ourselves."

Umjala did not refuse, though he seemed none too enthusiastic. "Van, you stick here with Mr. Wilbur," ordered Chuck, undoubtedly thinking of the girl asleep in the tent.

Taking rifles, the rest of us were off, single-file, the big Zulu gliding like a shadow in the lead. We had not gone a hundred yards before the fires had burned down. The landscape was again black as pitch. A root caught my foot and I went sprawling, while the American, immediately in front, chuckled. Then I heard him cursing roundly as he ran full tilt into a thorn-tree.

Umjala, with the eyes of a cat, never hesitated, nor did Prinsloo or the long-legged Englishman. When we reached the slope of the koppie there was again a faint light. We went up cautiously and saw that only the bushwood embers glowed dimly.

Not a soul was in sight.

Led by Umjala, we slowly circled the spot, from a distance. The twin blaze on the neighboring koppie also had died away. For more than an hour we sleuthed about the spot, but not a trace of a Zulu did we find.

"Well, what's the answer?" demanded Chuck.

"A bally Zulu scare, to try our mettle," guessed Bertram.

Umjala droned in his low, imperfect English to Chuck, who in a few moments informed us that the pyres had evidently been fired by signal parties who vanished quickly to start more blazes on other far stretches of the veld.

THERE was nothing to do but return to camp. We found the Basuto boys, badly frightened, had drawn the cape-carts close together for a barricade. Jan the Hottentot pointed in great excitement to a shining object in the starlight, sticking in the ground at our tent door. The figure of the exporter trotted out from the Wilbur tent, followed less hurriedly by Van der Merwe.

"Now we're in for it, boys! In for it! Van, tell 'em about that spear!" The capitalist waved his arms, followed the interested Prinsloo toward it. Umjala stood in tense attitude, eyes on the object.

The Boers exchanged looks. "I didn't pull it out," said Van der Merwe, "because I wanted you to see it."

Prinsloo studied the position of the tent and the blade. "This is a message from the Zulus, meant as a warning," he muttered, extracting the assegai from the ground. "Did anyone see it thrown?"

"No one," answered Van der Merwe. "I was first to see it. Its position at the doorway spells a threat. The blacks all heard the dull sound of the blade penetrating the soil, and drew up the carts. It was thrown from a good distance, as the depth it sank shows."

"We're in for it! Should have beat it out of this hellhole early in the evening! We're sure surrounded now, boys!" Jonathan Wilbur flourished his fat arms. "The jig's up—unless Ted here loads us onto that blamed flivver and makes a run for it!"

Chuck was conversing in low tones with Umjala. He came over. "No, we've got to stick till daylight—our only chance. Better get under cover and lay low. The less we know the better!" He ordered the blacks to their blankets, and hastily and noiselessly we drew the stakes and moved our own tent directly against that containing the sleeping Elsie.

We sat under the canvas, alert and listening, saying little. The exporter, wide-eyed but at last silent, hunched in the passageway connecting the two tents by the raising of adjoining walls. Bertram, cool and collected, had ceased to pooh-pooh the idea of an uprising. There was no need for speculation. Our whereabouts were known, and, what concerned our own party most—probably our mission, the Beast of the Bosveld and the blue diamond.

After an hour and no further disturbance, we discussed guard relief while the rest might sleep. In the midst of this there came to our ears a most peculiar sound. I did not recognize it, but my Boer companions did, for they raised their rifles to their knees.

No further word was spoken for some minutes, while the strange sound continued. Bertram had raised to a crouch. Chuck White was standing, head cocked forward. I took a firmer grip on my weapon as Prinsloo whispered low and cautiously:

"The Zulus! It is the noise of men on the move. The light beating of assegais on shields!"

WE LISTENED, for the disturbance was growing more distinct. The Seattle capitalist had crept forward from the passageway between the tents; his pudgy hand gripped my shoulder, and there was no quaver in it. In a crisis he was game. "Good gosh!" he whispered. "Have we got to fight these devils in the dark—can't see what we're shootin' at—"

"Sh-h." The warning was from Prinsloo. Outside we saw a form moving in the darkness. It was Umjala, gliding cautiously toward our tent.

"Put out the light of your tobacco fires!" he cautioned. "Make like sleep!" He was gone in the darkness. Our smokes were quickly extinguished.

For a time we continued to sit unspeaking, ears straining to the ominous sound which could not have originated more than five hundred yards away. There was not the hint of a voice out there among the moving horde, no shouting, no beating of calabash drums, nothing but the subdued, faintly metallic "ting" "ting" of assegai point on hard ox-hide shield.

A distinct fear mounting to conviction seized me; our "lion hunt" was known to be bogus; we were to be the objects of Zulu treachery, to be surrounded and perhaps butchered in the dark.

Something of my feeling must have been sensed by Prinsloo, for I felt the Boer's big hand again press mine.

"Don't worry, old fellow. The Zulus seldom attack at night," he said cautiously. "This is an old trick of theirs to put fear into their enemies."

This was small comfort, but it was some. In perhaps ten minutes Umjala the Zulu returned. He felt his way in among us.

"We are being surround' in circle by strong *impi*," he whispered. "But not'ing will happen till daylight."

"Thank heaven for that," breathed the capitalist. "Ted, you get that bus tuned up before that time—I'll get Elsie—you two make a run for it, while we hold 'em off."

"We'll see," Chuck put him off. If we were surrounded by a well-drilled Zulu regiment, such an undertaking would be folly.

Abruptly the rustling metallic sounds ceased. The silence that followed seemed more ominous. Outside the Basuto boys lay like porcupines, too scared to move a muscle. The minutes dragged, fifteen minutes, the half hour, and no sound save the restless stirring of the mules and the rustle of leaves in the bush. An hour passed, and we began to breathe more easily.

"Better turn in, some of you," grunted Chuck. "Umjala knows what to expect from these birds. Better if we all snatch a bit of sleep. Umjala's gone to bed."

"You're right, old chap." The Englishman drew his long legs under a blanket.

"Good gosh, no!" gasped the exporter. "Couldn't sleep a wink. What if those devils swooped down on us and cut us to pieces before morning?"

"They won't." Chuck suited the action to the words and rolled in. He was soon breathing in easy slumber.

But the rest of us had no intention of losing consciousness, strong as our faith in the big Zulu guide was. We sat throughout the night, speaking little save in whispers, eyes straining through the tent opening into the darkness. If the savages were still about us, they too must have gone to sleep.

Toward morning, while the landscape was still shrouded in darkness, Chuck suddenly sat up. A figure passed the opening in the tent—Umjala. Chuck glided out, and after low words, returned, rousing the Englishman.

"You drive a car, Bertram?" he demanded.

The government man yawned. "Well, yes, it's one of my accomplishments—"

"Wake Miss Elsie, Dad. Umjala's gone to see if the way's clear. May make the try. Bertram, you'll drive with Elsie. We'll cover the retreat."

The Britisher stared. "Bally rot," he drawled. "You'll drive the car—"

"I'm running this show." Chuck was gone, silently, out into the clearing. We saw his figure dimly outlined working with the flivver. In a moment we heard voices in the adjoining tent. "Zulus, Pet—Zulus! On the warpath! Got us surrounded! Nothing to fear! We'll get you out if the last man dies in the attempt! Hurry! You go out in the flivv—"

"Hand me my rifle," commanded a calm girlish voice. "I'll not go—I'm as much a man as the best of you—with a gun. Where's Teddy?"

"He's gettin' the bus ready! Hurry—it's his scheme! Jack Bertram drives you! We cover the retreat! Good heavens, can't you see you're in danger! No cause for alarm! But—but—"

Elsie Wilbur climbed through the opening into our tent, rifle in hand. "What's all this nonsense, Jack? If there's going to be a fight, I'm going to be in it—"

"Sh-h!" The warning came from Van der Merwe. "Quiet. There may be no danger, but we must not appear to be leaving."

"And I had my heart set on a crocodile hunt with Teddy!"

"Sh-h!" The Boer raised a finger. The first dim streaks of dawn were creeping through the darkness. There was no sound without. The mules stood munching the grass in peaceful content. Chuck White's quick-moving little figure traveled back toward the tent, halted ten feet away as the big Zulu appeared in the clearing. There were rapid words, and Umjala darted toward the cape-carts. Chuck was at the entrance.

"Can't make it. Surrounded—best chance is to stick here—"

"Oh, Teddy! What is it? I'll not go—count my rifle in with the best of them!" pleaded the girl.

"Too late? Great Scott!" Her father poked his head forward. From the clearing hurried Umjala, escorting the boy Breakfast, the only other Zulu among the blacks. The big native reached the tent with a few long strides.

"They are coming, *Inkoos*. Their *Indunas*. Breakfast and me must hide." He emitted a low lip sound and the Zulu boy slipped noiselessly into the opening. "The men of the *impi* must not see us here! You, Boss, white men hold *indaba* with them." The Zulus dropped their evil-smelling jackal skins in the far corner of the tent, lay flat and pulled the covering over them.

From behind and in front burst the ominous "ting" "ting" of the spears drumming on shields. At the edge of the clearing advanced the military chiefs, directly on our tent, for what Umjala had indicated was to be a parley.

VAN DER MERWE, rifle in hand, had stepped into the open, with Prinsloo immediately behind him. Bertram closed the tent flap, where Elsie had been standing with her father, who was apprehensively holding her elbow. "You've got to get back, Elsie, out of sight," warned Chuck. He drew father and daughter to one side, away from the entrance. Then, while I tried to get a view of the approaching emissaries, he pushed past us and boldly walked out into the open clearing. From the edge of the flap I saw him halt and calmly light a cigar. The Englishman emerged from the tent, his weapon over his forearm, and I followed.

"What's the big idea?" demanded the young American in loud tones, with as much impatience as though the savages might understand his Yankee words. Turning to the scared Basuto boys, huddled behind the cape-carts, he called:

"Hey, you kaffirs, come here and say howdy to these Zulu birds!" He chewed viciously on his cigar.

Nerved somewhat by his boldness, our menials moved over among us. The envoys of the savages continued to approach. They were six in number, led by a fellow of great height and bulk, whom we put down at a glance as an *Induna* of importance. They were decked out in their battle finery and all carried heavy *knopkiries*, with thick knobs, and assegais. Their shields, however, they had left behind.

They were fine fellows physically, tall and muscular. Their features were of a finer, more aquiline mold than other Bantu tribesmen, and they did not have so strongly negroid traits, thick lips and flat noses. With the exception of the chief they were remarkably spare, devoid of all fat. Each wore a loin covering of *impala*-skin, and over this a sort of *kaross* of blesbok skin that reached almost to the hips.

In the early daylight we beheld an *Induna* who, despite his bigness, was well proportioned, a truly imposing figure of a man. Around his head he wore the black Zulu ring of his dignity, made up on his natural hair of a mixture of fat, clay and wax. So perfectly rolled was this ring that it looked like a band of shiny ebony, and I afterward learned that the making of such a work of art often required an entire day. The approaching *Induna* wore a magnificent *kaross* of the finest leopard skins I have ever seen, and in his hand he carried a large *knopkirie* war club.

As the *Induna* and his staff came nearer, the rhythmic beating on shields in the distance ceased. There was the glint of assegai blades behind the wait-a-bit thicket several hundred yards away. It was plain the plenipotentiaries were well backed by an *impi* of fighting men ready to annihilate us should we offer violence to their six spokesmen. It was their customary strategy.

"Ask 'em what they want," snapped the little American, as the visitors came to a halt within speaking distance. He turned his gaze on Prinsloo.

The Boer gazed tranquilly on the *Induna*. Seating himself with the utmost leisure on an overturned biscuit tin, he proceeded to fill his pipe, and waited. The veteran was not to be stampeded into opening negotiations. He knew the Zulus, and understood the importance of the white man's dignity in the face of haughty Zulu pride. Falling into the same mood, Van der Merwe turned to me to remark about the weather.

The warriors were drawn up severely to their full height. The deep voice of the *Induna* boomed melodiously upon us.

"Greetings!" he said, in his native tongue, while Prinsloo droned placidly after him. "Greetings to you men of the *Ama-Boer* and from the far-away lands beyond the great water. We know that you do not enter our homeland to hunt *the-great-one-that-roars-by-night*." He paused for effect at this challenge to our mask of lion hunting.

"Go on!" piped Chuck, cheerfully. "Some speech! What about that hide stretched out on these pegs?" He gestured toward the skin on the ground. Before Prinsloo could repeat the words in Zulu, the *Induna* flung a hand outward toward the slain lion.

"You do not come for that. Rather do you come like the jackal that hovers around our watch-fire, or the *aas-vogel* that hangs high in the skies, waiting for its prey. *Aai!* Your servants, those dogs of Basutos, sons of those whom our fathers drove from the plains into the mountains, have served you badly. They were ever like women, talking too much! They spoke too many words when they crossed the Umvoti *manza* at the drift. *Aai!* Our ears are always everywhere in the bush."

He paused again, as though to measure his own eloquence. Prinsloo had lighted his pipe and was blowing out great clouds of smoke, gazing into the maze as though lost in day-dreams. The chieftain raised his *kirie* threateningly.

"Now that you have learned the secret of the great killer of the Umvoti, the Beast of the Bosveld in whom dwells the spirit of the black bull of the *Ama-Zoolah*, *aai* the Sacred Crocodile, you shall never leave the country of the Zulu people alive!" The words of the *Induna* were not spoken in anger or in heat, but with a cold deliberation and haughtiness that was doubly terrifying.

"We therefore give you the choice of dying in battle, as befits men, with your faces to the sun, or of cowardly flight—in which case we will capture the last of you, and put you to death like women. *The white maiden alone shall be spared.*"

So low did the Boer repeat the last frightful sentence of the translation that only the group outside the tent could have heard, and Elsie and her father were spared the culminating threat. Chuck White's ruddy boyish face clouded swiftly and his gray eyes held a glint of chilled steel.

LIFTING his *kirie* in salute, as befitted an ambassador delivering an ultimatum, the chief turned his back on us and his five companions swung on their heels with him.

It was a demonstration of courage, for Chuck White had half raised his rifle, and we could have picked off most of them easily. I had tilted up my own weapon when the savage swung his *kirie*, so near was he standing over the head of Prinsloo. But the Boer's quick "None of that!" hinted better strategy, and Chuck White too lowered his gun to await developments.

The Zulus slowly and with imperturbable dignity marched back to the *bos* and rejoined their fellows. Now arose from the thicket a regular chanting, the clamor of assegais on shields, and the measured stamping of hundreds of naked feet.

Slowly at first, then more rapidly, they pranced back and forth in the grass, drawing steadily nearer, eyes fastened upon us to see how we would choose to die. Plainly their young warriors, several hundred strong, were anxious for us to show fight.

"Great Scott, no! You mustn't, Pet!" There was a movement from the tent behind us.

"There, there, Dad—I must." The voice of the girl was quiet and affectionate, but firm. The little huntress was among us, and before her father could check her she stepped forward between the grim-faced New Yorker and the cool, ready Englishman. Her features were slightly pale, her rifle was held at an easy angle, muzzle to the front. Jonathan Wilbur, awkwardly gripping his weapon, pushed ahead of us, alongside his daughter. I was about to step forward, to the front line the four of them had formed, when the hand of Prinsloo restrained me. He uttered a low warning, for those in front to hear: "Don't get excited. Don't shoot, whatever you do, until attacked."

I saw that the two veterans of the Transvaal were not remaining behind through fear; they continued cool and outwardly indifferent, their readiness masked by an air of carelessness. Now was no time for panic; no time even for taking things too seriously. "We must not let them bait us into battle," droned Prinsloo, while the savages continued their terrifying advance. On the instant Chuck White dropped his rifle and darted farther out into the clearing. In a moment his antics held the attention of all of us.

The American had taken up a chunk of a tree limb resembling a *kirie* and began a grotesque parade in front of us. He tossed his helmet into the grass, and mimicked in laughable detail the strut of the *Induna*, following it up with a heavy booming of the voice and raising of arms that had marked the chieftain's oration. The antics arrested the attention of the warriors immediately; they ceased their war dance and watched the maneuver. Concluding the mock speech, the salesman swung the stick, turned on his heel and suddenly seemed to trip over. He righted himself from a somersault and grimaced at the Zulus with his fingers to his nose.

"Lay low. Don't let 'em get your goat!" he flung our way, earnestly. "We'll slip these highbinders a package yet."

The effect of his monkeyshines before the Zulus was not unexpected. Without a doubt they had spared his life because they thought him demented. While they had paused to watch him, silent and unmoving, they now broke forth into a frightful flood of yells, and matched the noise with renewed rhythmic prancing, leaping and stamping, back and forth, that was truly overawing. Rapidly they moved closer to our camp, until we were facing a semi-circle of infuriated wild men who were waiting only for the signal of the chieftain to dispatch us.

For many minutes this continued, every man of us tense, waiting, ready to fire his rifle when the attack actually began. The faces of Prinsloo and Van der Merwe were grave; Bertram and Wilbur did not move. Chuck White had leisurely taken his place beside Elsie, lifted his rifle, and his jaw was hard set. The girl gazed on the sight fascinated, yet she did not flinch. Our Basuto boys trembled in fright behind us, and Umjala and Breakfast remained completely out of view under the jackal skins in the tent. Doubtless they were quavering in their hiding place.

Minute by minute the motion of the angry Zulus continued, back and forth, in and out, tauntingly. They lowered and raised their heads, pounded their muscular feet, and flourished their assegais.

Yet they made no move to lay a finger on any of us, even as their grimacing countenances were thrust banteringly into our faces. A thought flashed through my mind —the Zulus were bent on placing on us the onus of firing the first shot, as Prinsloo had foreseen.

Whites and Zulus, for the present at least, were not on a war footing. Treacherous as were the blacks, they would not start hostilities until King Dinizulu gave the signal that he was ready for a great uprising. An overt act would give him the very excuse he sought. We should place ourselves in a false position if, having invaded Zululand, we should be the first to take life, even if threatened. The Zulu is not only a great warrior, but also a diplomat, always contriving for a semblance of right and justice.

AS THE Zulu line swung back, this judgment was fortified with a cautious warning from our tent to ignore the war dance. It was the first word from Umjala since he had crawled under the *kaross*.

Our failure to open fire seemed to perplex the warriors when, after repeated sallies, taunts and threats, they made a final bid for battle. Ten feet away they paused and four of the biggest of them converged suddenly and rushed forward, two of them on either side of Elsie Wilbur. The girl's rifle leaped up, only an instant before those of Bertram and Chuck White. The quartet halted in their tracks; the din of the myriad assegais ceased.

There was a moment of tense silence. Prinsloo afterward said the rush would have been renewed within a few seconds. But at that juncture a savage cry split the stillness from the bush behind our tent.

It was the warning yelp of a Zulu. Its effect was electric. The giant *Induna* uttered a single shrill sound, and the whole body of the savages swayed back, faces toward us. Swiftly they swung from the open veld and dropped into the *bos*. The demonstration had ended as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed them.

"Wh—what was that!" gasped the amazed exporter, the color suddenly returning to his florid features.

"It was the voice of Umjala," informed Prinsloo, with a deep sigh of relief. "He yelled to the *Induna* that a white army was coming through the bush."

"By Jove, a false alarm—but they'll soon find it out," declared the Englishman.

We were not deceived by the withdrawal, knowing well that it meant only a postponement of what they had planned for us. In a moment we were back to the tent. An interesting sight greeted us. Umjala had cast aside the garb of a civilized native, as had the boy Breakfast. Each had adorned himself in *karoos* and *moocha*, or loin-cloth, of the Zulus. If we had had any doubt of the big guide's loyalty, it was dissipated now.

"You hollered that scare?" queried Chuck.

The Zulu nodded, his features immobile.

"Think we can make a run for it, in the flivver?"

Umjala shook his head slowly. He declared we were still encircled; he had gone back for a few feet in the bush, without being seen, but many of the men of the *impi* were behind him. An attempt to flee would be fatal; escape was impossible.

We did not need the word of Umjala that our offence was the most heinous that could be conceived against this high-stomached race—discovery of the secret of the Beast of the Bosveld and contemplated loot of the blue diamond. We knew that the threat we should not return to Natal alive was not an idle one, so far as the savages were concerned.

Elsie Wilbur, her cheeks aglow from a refreshing night's sleep in the crisp air of the veld, was apparently the least affected of any of us by the morning's experience. Plainly she did not know that the savages had singled her out for special consideration; she did not even realize that the culminating rush of the warriors had been directed against her. "What in the world did that general mean when he said we knew the secret of the Sacred Crocodile?" she wanted to know.

"Yeah, what the mischief?" from her stare-eyed father.

"Bally rot," drawled Bertram. "He's crazy, or inventing an excuse to precipitate a fight. We were never in danger, so long as we kept our heads. By Jove, I didn't even tell 'em who I was! Would have done so, if they'd have got really menacing. I know 'em like a book!"

The Boers exchanged glances, and Chuck strode off without a word toward the Basutos, whom he set to work preparing breakfast.

"But are you sure?" Elsie was skeptical; she swung about toward Chuck White. "You were on a crocodile hunt, Teddy! Perhaps that is what the Zulus meant."

"Sure thing! That's it, by jingoes!" from the Seattle man. "I'll bet—"

"You said it," growled Chuck. "But we'll talk about it later."

"I'll bet it's the crocodile hunt! That's what stirred up this fuss!" The exporter gesticulated excitedly. "That lets *us* out!" tilting his head toward the Englishman. "Why'n the mischief didn't you tell 'em, White, that we didn't have designs on their blamed crocodiles? What's a crocodile hide when it comes to being chopped up and hacked to pieces by savages! Dammit, we'll start right back, and if they raise a finger, we'll tell 'em to keep their plagued alligators! We'll—"

"But, Daddy, we've got a permit to hunt crocodiles, or lions, or anything!"

"Let's eat." Chuck smiled grimly. He had had an occasional word aside with Umjala, and his mind seemed to be made up to some course of action. It was fortunate at least that the Wilbur party did not even now realize the plight we were in. At this very moment the savages doubtless were in hiding all about us, watching our every move. Having failed to prod us into battle, they were expecting flight. That would be the signal for attack, for their failure to taunt us into battle would not alter their purpose to keep us from carrying the secret of the blue diamond out of Zululand. Chuck called the four of his own party together immediately after breakfast.

"NOW what's to be done? We've got the girl to think of, first of all."

To flee, Van der Merwe declared, would be folly, since the Zulus would fall upon us at one of the numerous wooded passes of the trail. Here we were at least in the open, where our rifles would be the match for several assegais each.

There was nothing to do, the Boers agreed, but to bide our time, and to sell our lives dearly when attacked.

Chuck chewed on his cigar. "Think we'd better tell these others the low-down on this crocodile stunt?"

No, it would only frighten them the more, we agreed. The salesman looked at Umjala. He motioned the guide aside, talked in low tones. We heard him mention the girl traveler, heard the Zulu murmur "white queen," words that caused us to shudder. As Chuck rejoined us his jaw was outthrust.

"Here's the situation," he said earnestly. "If we run, we'll be speared. If we stay, we're no match for their superior numbers. *If we go on, we'll bluff them out.*"

"Out of the blue diamond?" queried Van der Merwe, dryly. Umjala showed his white teeth in a smile, the first I had seen on his saturnine countenance.

"Perhaps." The young American turned to the guide. "Tell 'em, Umjala."

The Zulu, standing tall and imposing in his savage costume, spoke gravely in his own tongue.

"The *Inkoos*," referring to Chuck, "says right. If we run or remain here we are lost. But if we push ahead, withholding our rifle fire, traveling straight to Dinizulu's royal kraal, as emissaries with a mission, our lives will be safe at least until we reach there. Because," he concluded, "our foes will know we are at their mercy all the while."

Coming from Umjala, this counsel impressed all of us. It seemed bold, but sane, since we had no choice. Van der Merwe had an inspiration.

"If we could shoot that croc, we could trade the big blue stone for our safe conduct out," he murmured.

Prinsloo chuckled deeply. "Just like putting salt on a bird's tail. The Sacred Pool will be very heavily guarded now."

His Boer companion grunted good-naturedly. "I was thinking of a ruse we tried near Eshowe. The Zulus had carried off the wife and children of a Natal trader, and were keeping them as hostages. Our commandant, Slim Willem Bezuidenhout, ordered us to form a half ring about the village, and to set fire to the dry grass. Then as the natives rushed out in panic to fight the fire, we slipped in behind, took the captives and escaped."

He puffed at his pipe. "When Umjala points out the pool we might fire the grass. It would send the warriors out of the way while we dispose of the few guards and handle Mister *Kaaiman*."

"Fine," grinned Chuck, "except for the fact that Umjala is as ignorant about the exact location of the pool as we are!"

I was astonished at this, for Chuck had given me his word that his Zulu friend was prepared to lead us to the Beast of the Bosveld. I said as much.

"Nix," he came back. "I said he'd lead us to the crocodile, well and good. But in his own way. Playing sneaks on a puddle of water doesn't appeal to me. All we've got to do, since we've got to keep going, is to get the natives to tote out the crocodile to us, dead or alive, as we want him!"

"If you had told me that, I'd never have started on this hunt," I told him quietly. Prinsloo frowned.

"You mean to say that was your original plan?" he asked slowly.

"Sure. I'm banking on Umjala. But the point is, you've got to go now—you can't back out. You don't think I'd go on, and take a girl into Zululand, if I didn't think we'd win, do you?"

Van der Merwe's big features had slowly colored. "*You* might think anything, my young friend! But I guess it's a fight if we go or stay, and we might as well go."

"What if Bertram and Wilbur balk?" I wanted to know.

"They won't," assured the New Yorker. "Not after they see there's no choice. And they'll count on their sub-secretary government man talking King Dinizulu off his throne if need be! Maybe he will—"

"About as much chance as for us to get the blue diamond," broke in Van der Merwe sourly.

"Well, I'll tell 'em how things stand." Chuck left us and talked for some minutes with Jonathan Wilbur and the Englishman. After much arm-waving and excited protests from the exporter, Chuck won his point.

"But nary a step," expostulated the capitalist, "if you're going gunning for the blamed crocodiles that have caused all this fuss."

Chuck promised and drew back to the

tent with Elsie. For some moments he talked with her quietly and earnestly. We had no way of knowing what he said to her, but he must have realized that on the decision he was making depended more than even life itself. I knew how much he worshiped her, and when he returned and gave the order to pack I felt the trek further into Zululand was our only hope for ultimate safety.

"We've got to get the Beast of the Bosveld," he gritted, as he hurried over to load the flivver.

"But you promised Wilbur you wouldn't go gunning for the crocodile—"

"We won't. But we'll get him just the same."

ALL was calm and serene about our camp as we finished packing our cape-carts. We inspanned the mules and for the best possible defense on the trek rearranged our positions. In the dust-laden touring car with Chuck was Bertram, in front, and Van der Merwe and myself seated high on the rear provision pack, with Umjala squatted low between seats. In the first cape-cart were Jonathan Wilbur and Elsie, with a native driver. Next came Prinsloo and Jan, with Breakfast hidden at one side of the pack. The remaining three carts carried the Basutos and most of the provisions. Our expedition headed direct for the bosveld.

We passed the spot where the warriors had first appeared an hour since with such frightful reality. The tranquility of the bush was astonishing. Umjala, buried deep in the flivver, told us we were within eight miles of the kraal of Dinizulu, son of Cetewayo, the last of a long line of native murderers.

Within an hour we were in the very heart of the Zulu wilderness, in the midst of the quiet precincts where not far off dwelt the Sacred Crocodile in one of the numerous pools of the Umvoti.

Umjala did not need to tell us that our every move was being observed. We were not now molested for the simple reason that we were going deeper into the trap. Thus far had Chuck's decision been one of wisdom. Few words were spoken; even the talkative exporter held his peace save for an occasional word that was demanded by some remark of his daughter. The girl's merry laughter of the night before was absent now, though she appeared to be cheerful. Van der Merwe was morose, and Prinsloo, back in the second cart, seemed intent on scanning the bush, his rifle resting on his knee. The Boers were men of families; their thoughts at such a time were doubtless of wife and children. Bertram smoked innumerable cigarets and watched the roadside.

"*Hoenderdief!*" muttered Van der Merwe abruptly, as we turned a bend into an open place. His hand was raised above him toward the poised form of a buzzard.

"Is a bad sign," breathed the big Zulu, raising his head slightly. Inwardly he seemed greatly agitated, for the native never loses his superstitions. We were relieved soon to lose sight of the bird.

Another hour of unmolested travel almost made the events of the morning seem like a remote nightmare. The calm of the silent bosveld continued uninterrupted; our courage mounted with our spirits. Umjala, between seats, became more sociable, chatted about old familiar landmarks. Bertram yawned, more relaxed, and talked governmental responsibilities to Chuck. Our voices sounded unduly loud in the quiet bosveld. The young American chuckled, at some remark of the Englishman. The chuckle went deep into all of us, releasing the tension. Van der Merwe turned on me with a grin, the first he had vouchsafed since leaving camp.

"Fellows," he said, "let's make a real try at it. It is a fight any way we take it. Let's bluff them out, as our young friend says, instead of waiting for them to finish us."

"Assuredly!" asserted Bertram in surprise, for he was not yet in on our crocodile secret. "What else? My word, there isn't a bit of choice!"

We agreed, talked in bold courage of seeing King Dinizulu face to face, our voices ringing through the silent wilderness. Chuck White, at the wheel, laughed as the flivver routed a family of baboons, the old man of the yellow simians chattering wildly at the mother, who fled into the bush with a baby on her back. Chuck was his old self again, his high spirits no doubt due to confidence in Umjala. "We'll give 'em a surprise," he chuckled. "Got to," he added more seriously, "got to, for Elsie's sake!"

"She's safe enough, old top, with me along," drawled the Englishman.

Chuck gave him a look, said nothing. I asked Bertram if he had not heard what the Zulu chief had said about *sparing* the white maiden.

"Of course. All a misunderstanding." Bertram lit a fresh cigaret. "My dear chap, I know the Zulus. They're deluded. Dinizulu, no doubt, would like a white queen, treat her royally too; marry her with full ceremony." The sub-secretary's eyes twinkled, noting how shocked we were, while the young American scowled darkly. "Confound it all, the king is due for a real surprise! Your Zulu respects women, too—married women. By Godfrey! I can see Dinizulu's eyes pop when he learns Elsie is my wife. That will let her out completely, a perfect passport, so far as Elsie is concerned." The Englishman laughed easily.

"Your wife!" Van der Merwe and I uttered the exclamation in unison. The flivver suddenly bucked in the sand, halted. Chuck had killed the engine. He gave forth no sound, but sat as though glued to the wheel, his gaze unseeing on the trail ahead. Mechanically he roused himself, climbed down and turned the crank, all the life utterly gone from his usual alert, cheerful countenance. Van der Merwe vented good-natured curiosity. "You are honeymooners?" he asked, smiling. "By golly, I thought I heard you once call her Miss Elsie!"

"No doubt." The Britisher drew up his long legs, laughed back at us. "It was a secret. My word, it was agreed we would not announce it until after our honeymoon lion hunt. Now of course it is different—I shall have to tell the king. Good Lord, it was fortunate we did not postpone the ceremony until after this trip, as Elsie at first wanted to do. What's that!" He gestured beyond a small clearing.

WE HAD seen the warrior runner at the same instant. The Boer clenched his teeth, took a firmer grip on his rifle, and mine was in readiness. Chuck stared in a daze toward the vanishing Zulu, who plainly was keeping even pace with us, at a distance.

Jonathan Wilbur had excitedly called for a halt and was nervously swaying his rifle toward the thicket. Chuck roused himself, pressed the brake to a stop, lifted the gun. We were ready if ambushed to give the Zulus a taste of Anglo-Saxon lead. Umjala grunted impatiently from his hiding place. "Don't stop, *Inkoos*. The Zulus follow us from the beginning."

"We're done for!" called the exporter, while Elsie clutched his arm. "They've found out we tricked them—no white army behind us! They'll rush us! Better get out, threw up a barricade—!"

"Shake a leg, we're on our way!" the salesman sang-out. "My good gosh, Bertram, I forgot to congratulate you." He extended a hand and opened the throttle. "Darn lucky thing for Elsie you pulled that stunt, if these Zulu birds look at things that way! I'm almost glad, man, and you know how hard I tried to win her myself." He laughed strangely. I realized how hard he had been hit, knew he was masking his hurt now with a reckless mock cheerfulness. "That right, Umjala, about Dinizulu?" he asked, suddenly.

"The gobernment boss say right. The king believed the lady unmarried. He not want her now."

"Good enough! Now for the big play!" Chuck sent the car along at a reckless gait, until the capitalist's yells reminded him the cape-carts could not keep the pace. He slowed, glanced once at Elsie, and I saw his throat contract as he looked away. If he had had a word of congratulation for her he could not utter it.

Behind us the mules picked their way along the banks of the Umvoti, broken here and there by still, deep pools. Doubtless the years had shifted and altered these pools in the sandy ground; I realized how impossible it would be for Umjala to point out the particular hole sheltering the Sacred Crocodile after eighteen years. Chuck had decided it was time to let Bertram into part of his own secret.

"Umjala, what's this about a Sacred Croc in this man's country having a big blue diamond in his hide?"

The Zulu raised his head, looked puzzled. The American prompted him. "How'd they put the gem in the croc anyhow?"

The Zulu showed his teeth. "The great-one-that-watch-by-night-in-the-dark-hole-in-the-riber-that-have-no-bottom was caught on dry land — sleep in the sun. With pole, the young men turn him ober on his back. Put big rocks 'gainst his sides, so he could not move big, strong tail. Medicine - man's assegai cut open big, strong hide. The bos shook with his roars.

Slip in big stone. Big medicine man sew hide togedder with *riempies* of rawhide. The great-one's hide, he grow togedder, *Inkoos*."

Bertram laughed. "By Jove, that's a capital story—"

"And a true one," snapped Chuck. "You saw it, eh, Umjala?"

"Yes, Boss." The Zulu's voice was subdued but distinct. "My father, *Induna* 'Mba Zana, he was with me."

"That fish was worshiped long before that time, eh?"

"Yes, Boss. Before the big gold ring on the baby's neck was fed to the great-one by Nomazolo."

"By George!" muttered the Britisher. "That part's true enough, according to army records—the golden ring of royalty fed to the monster in the sacrifice, I mean. But that was way back in—let's see— No matter, we've got other things to think about."

"Live that long?" repeated Van der Merwe to my question. "Umjala's people have believed crocodiles to live a thousand years."

"We know the great-one libes many hundreds," said the Zulu.

"Confound it, we'll think of the business in hand!" from Bertram, taking out a fresh cigaret.

Chuck White shot him a glance. "What would you say, Bertram, if Umjala told you our only chance of getting out of this fix alive was to land the Beast of the Bosveld and the blue diamond?"

"I'd say he was an ass. By Jove, it's time we—"

"Wait and see." The young salesman guided the car around a bend in the trail. We had entered a particularly dense stretch of the bosveld. Umjala, still low between seats, peered cautiously out, only forehead and eyes showing. I judged we were now in a part of the wilderness especially familiar to him, and was not mistaken.

"Soon," said the Zulu, "just ahead—the kraal!" The announcement brought us up with a jerk.

WE HAD seen no more of the Zulus since the runner in the bush some miles back; we saw none now. The young salesman did not check the steady grind of the flivver; he seemed fully absorbed now in the trail ahead, and had not once turned his eyes toward Elsie Wilbur since the glance that had caused the peculiar contraction of the throat. He had had no opportunity to speak to her, else he might have sought from her own lips verification of the secret wedding announced by the Englishman. We gave no hint to the following cape-carts that we were on the threshold of Dinizulu's royal presence. For one thing we mistrusted a possible outburst from the erratic capitalist.

Suddenly through a shimmering expanse of the undergrowth we caught a glimpse of a hut ahead. Chuck brought the flivver to an abrupt stop.

"In that clearing the kraal," shot out Umjala, in an undertone. "To right and left of us and behind, warriors. Can not turn back now. The *Inkosis* let the Boss Chuck be your guide now into village."

He stretched lower in the bottom of the touring car, and pulled the tarpaulin of the gasoline pack over himself. Breakfast, in the second cape-cart, hid out effectively also, as we learned afterward. Chuck again drove ahead, more slowly.

When he applied the brakes a second time we were in a sheltered spot from which we could look directly into the clearing. A glance behind revealed Jonathan Wilbur standing up in the cape-cart, staring, but speechless.

Before us lay the kraal, composed of a large circle of huts, many hundreds of them, surrounding a great open square.

All appeared tranquil. Close to the outer edge of the dwellings a few Zulu women were at work in a field, cultivating the soil among the *mielie* plants, babies tied to their backs. Here and there within the village we saw people crawling from the bee-hive huts on their hands and knees. They seemed to be expecting no visitors at this kraal. We were to learn that this quiet aspect of things was a mask, imposed by royal command of King Dinizulu himself.

"Some town," drawled Chuck. "Look at that goat going into the hut where the woman just came out."

Not only a goat, but some chickens also were moving in and out of the *kayas*, where livestock and humans dwell together in Zululand. Except possibly for Chuck we had other things on our minds than the quaint customs of the savages.

The young New Yorker seemed in no

hurry. Cautiously Umjala lifted the edge of the tarpaulin and whispered:

"Big hut in center *rondavel* of Dinizulu the king."

There was not a sign of life near it, which seemed strange.

"The Boss Chuck, he must go there—tell 'em," added the Zulu guide, and again settled back out of sight.

Bertram continued to smoke cigarets, in perfect calm. An awesome voice behind us, Wilbur's, queried if this was the king's stronghold.

It was. While the latest of a long line of Zulu capitals, it was devised on the plan of Chaka, the Black Napoleon, as most effective for defense. The large open place in the center gave the warriors room for drilling and maneuvers, as well as providing a safe place for cattle during a siege. Into this enclosure we must go within a very few minutes.

The first native driver had drawn the Wilbur cape-cart up close. Jan the Hottentot was not far behind, with Prinsloo and the boy Breakfast.

"Go along," drawled Bertram, coolly. "We'll drive right up. I'll tell Dinizulu who I am—official of the Natal government. By Jove, we'll get it over with and start right back with safe conduct."

His words fell on unheeding ears, for Chuck White was surveying the village with a critical eye, while Van der Merwe leaned forward to whisper to him that peaceful appearances were undoubtedly deceptive.

"Now what?" asked the Seattle exporter, huskily. "Can't get cold feet now! Go ahead—this uncertainty would kill a man! Might as well face 'em, since we're headed for the jaws of the tiger anyway!"

"Yes, you had better drive right in!" from Elsie. "Jack, you can explain things, then we can leave, and even go on with our crocodile hunt unmolested—"

"Sh-h!" The Boer raised his hand warningly. There was a movement in the bush as of stealthy feet. Chuck White turned in his seat, toward Van der Merwe and Prinsloo.

"You know a good Yankee air?" he asked.

" 'Yankee Doodle,' 'Dixie,' " he went on, enigmatically. "Anything?"

Prinsloo raised his big head, looked at the young American keenly, while Bertram squinted at the salesman through half-shut lids.

"Here's the idea!" added Chuck, with enthusiasm. "We'll let them know we're on the way. Instead of sneaking into the kraal like a bunch of whipped curs, we'll go in with a bang."

"Singing?" Prinsloo's eyes suddenly twinkled. "We know your air, Ta-ra-ra boom de—"

"Good enough." The joke had lost its point. The idea was an inspiration, since our whole hazardous undertaking depended upon "front" more than anything. Chuck ordered the Basutos to dig out the empty petroleum cans.

A few minutes later there was an abrupt awakening throughout the kraal when to the drum-beats of the cans we brought our flivver and mules past the outer rim of the huts singing in noisy chorus, in which the Boers and Elsie contributed the only real harmony. The Transvaal hunters waxed enthusiastic with

Ta-ra-ra boom-de-ay—
Oom Paul het vark gery,
Afgeval en seer gekry—
Opgeklim en weer gery!

Not grammatical Dutch, but the typical Boer Taal doggerel of the old-time Transvaal elections song:

Ta-ra-ra boom-de-ay,
Oom Paul rode a pig today;
Took a flip-flop off—but say!
Hopped back on, and rode away!

Even our natives joined in, adding a weird chant to the din. The effect was not more astonishing on the Zulu village than on ourselves, our booming voices inspiring us so that we moved along like conquering heroes entering the kraal of a defeated foe. Chuck had turned the wheel over to the surprised Englishman, and the youngster sat perched high on the back of the front seat, swinging his gas-measure rule for a baton while the Boers joined the natives thumping the petroleum can drums. The female laborers fled from the corn-fields into the enclosure, which had taken on a changed aspect.

Men, women and children quickly appeared from everywhere and lined the dusty roadway. From all sides of the kraal, including the passage behind us, streaked the young men of the Zulus, the warriors, running swiftly, much excited, with assegais and shields. These crowded back the old men and children; mothers made way with the little fellows, lifted up tiny urchins chewing *imfe*, the sugarcane "Zulu candy." The populace made no effort to halt either the mules or the "devil that runs alone," the automobile of which they had vaguely heard but had never seen until now. Our noisy procession headed straight for the great *rondavel* of Dinizulu, tyrant of the Zulu nation.

Our action in driving up before the big hut was the signal for a wild outburst. A thunderous clamor of shouts arose, mingled with the beating on calabash drums, drowning our own efforts. The fighting men of the *impi* swayed back in perfect maneuver, spread out, and we were encircled.

"God, we're done for!" croaked the pudgy capitalist behind us. "The jig's up, boys—but we'll die fightin' like white men!"

HIS low, husky words were unheeded. Our travel-stained touring car, followed by the carts, had come to a stop before a throng of several hundred immediately in front of Dinizulu's "palace." Chuck shot out a word to Bertram to be ready for his speech, then bounded lightly to the ground and faced the mob.

"Where—bigum chief—Dinizulu?" he demanded, idiotically enough, as though addressing Chinamen or Indians. The Zulus responded instantly at the mention of the name of their notorious ruler.

"Dinizulu! Dinizulu!" chanted the crowd, close by at first, then throughout the assemblage. The words were doubly those of worship and news-bearing to all present.

Startlingly prompt was the answer. The dense circle opened behind us. From some spot away from the royal house, probably a temporary palace where the king had been in seclusion, appeared a small procession. A murmur spread through the throng.

In the lead strode a pompous, obese personage, followed by three "ringed" *Indunas*. Majestically they trod toward the spot where our outfit stood halted.

"*Bayete! Bayete!*" rose from a thousand throats at sight of the chieftain, shrilly at first, then deepening into a roar. By the royal salute we knew we were in the presence of the Black Napoleon the Second.

Around our group the four figures proceeded, eyes directed ahead, glancing neither to the right nor left, until they had wound their way to the door of the big hut. In painful dignity the king flourished his fat arms before the entrance. At the signal a Zulu youth, attired in gorgeous leopard skins, stepped to the doorway from within.

"*Bayete! Bayete!*" again rose the cry from those who could see the slender prince yet in his 'teens as he took his place alongside his elder. While the salute still rang beyond the inner circle and was taken up by others, the king mounted the slabs of stone that formed a dais before his palace.

Behind the royal pair marched the chief *Induna*. But we noted that the other two commanders at a gesture from Dinizulu turned about and made their way back beyond the circle of spectators. One of them was the giant chieftain who had visited us in the bosveld.

With the exception of Chuck we had remained in our conveyances, the tall Englishman languidly leaning back in the front seat of the flivver calmly smoking a cigaret. Now the throng was pressing close to the royal palace, eager to catch the words of the king that might humble the white jackals and their Basuto dogs. Caught in the crush, the dextrous young American jumped lightly back into the car, beside Bertram. There, standing high up on the front seat, he faced the Zulu monarch. Without waiting for the king to speak he turned to Prinsloo, in the cape-cart behind us.

"Here, Prinz, tell him in Zulu what I'm going to spill!"

He faced Dinizulu.

"King, we're going to treat you white if you act like a good Indian!" He leaned from the flivver, spoke rapidly to Prinsloo.

The Boer straightened himself, rising in the cape-cart, and intoned in sonorous Zulu:

"*Bayete*, O Dinizulu, son of Cetewayo, son of Panda, *Bayete!*" He repeated the sentence for us, in English. "We came to you in friendship if you show like spirit. But our word is law." He gestured toward the interested, alert-eyed Elsie Wilbur and spoke a moment about her in Zulu alone, undoubtedly making clear that she was the bride of one of our party. "Now, before we bring up the matter of the great-one-that-watches-in-the-pool, the Sacred Crocodile—"

A deep, thunderous growl broke from the lips of Dinizulu. A moment of death-like silence was followed by a gradual murmuring that quickly grew into a wild, vengeful hubbub, and hundreds of assegais flashed in the sunlight. I grasped the arm of Van der

Merwe where we stood side by side as the face of the black monarch took on an expression I had rarely seen on a human being. The fat features overspread with a tint of blue pallor, swiftly reddening as the blood coursed close to the surface in explosive, amazed anger.

He raised his hand in slow gesture. It was an order; the murmuring ceased and there was the movement of hundreds of feet backward, widening the ring of spectators. Then moved quickly into the inner circle the men of the *impi*, the Zulu fighting unit, their assegais poised high.

"Tell him," remarked Chuck dryly, "not to try any monkey-business." And Prinsloo passed the word. The young salesman grinned down at the Englishman. "Now, Bertram, tell 'em where to head in!"

THE Britisher tossed aside his cigaret, untangled his long legs and rose slowly. An amused smile crept over his long-nosed face as he eyed the king. "Nothing much to say," he drawled, "except that my wife and I are representatives of the Great White Queen, whose servant is the Governor of Natal." He waited for the Boer to translate. "By Jove, I know jolly well the king of Zululand will be glad to give safe conduct to an official of the Natal government. And of course that means all of us." With an air of cool indifference he slid back under the steering wheel of the flivver.

A subdued, girlish exclamation from the first cape-cart broke the tension. "Whom do you mean by your wife, Jack?" Elsie asked in an undertone.

"I mean *you*," murmured Bertram out of the corner of his mouth, without turning around. "A little premature—had to do it—just a few days ahead of time. I'll explain—"

Elsie's gasp of astonishment did not escape Chuck. He met her swift glance, and his eyes hardened as they leaped to Bertram and clashed in hostility. Van der Merwe muttered a whispered warning. "He lied to save her—the Zulus!"

Recovering quickly, Chuck turned on the monarch. "Well, King, you know how we stand." He waited for the interpreter. "But we didn't come here to get a safe passport out, as the high-muck-a-muck Natal official says. We came here to talk crocodile!"

Stupefied with mingled rage and bewilderment, the Zulu ruler had stood unmoving, speechless. Now he turned on the young American, and did what astonished every one of us. He grinned, and his grin ripened into a broad smile.

"The young *Inkosi* speaks well!" he said, holding his fat chin high. "He is too brave to be a foe." Prinsloo interpreted. "Will the Natal official show us his credentials?" Dinizulu held forth a hand.

"Confound it, yes!" The Englishman was out of the car and with two long strides was up on the dais before the king. As he reached into his pocket for identification papers two of the giant *Indunas* beside the king lifted him as though he were a child and swept him back within the *rondavel*, completely out of sight.

Our rifles leaped, but a warning hiss from the hidden Umjala told us the folly of open battle. Dinizulu's smile broadened as his piggish eyes surveyed us in perfect assurance. Jonathan Wilbur groaned audibly.

"Got him," wailed the capitalist, lowering his gun. "We're outgeneraled—tricked by the black traitors! We're surrounded. Now they'll hack us to—"

"Shut up!" from Chuck. "Prinsloo, ask the king what's the big idea!"

The Boer conveyed the monarch's answer. "The official is our hostage. May the jackals rend from limb to limb the government of Natal! May the vultures feast on the bones of the whole British government that would enslave us! Now, *Inkosis*, we will hold *indaba* and discuss what brought you here!"

He uttered a command. The crowd swayed farther back; the inner ring of warriors widened, allowing a liberal cleared space about the flivver and the carts. King Dinizulu strode down from the dais, followed by the young Zulu prince and the big *Induna*. "Come feast with us," invited the monarch gravely. "They tell me you know where dwells the Great-One-in-the-Secret-Pool. But that cannot be; it is impossible. Therefore you may go in peace, provided you leave the hated Britisher behind with us." His rotund face clouded swiftly. "Leave the high and mighty government official in our hands; go back to Natal and spread the news. Tell the British we defy them; tell them to come and get him! We are ready!"

His fat arms motioned toward the fighting men of the *impi*, drawn up in formation like the trained regiment they were. "We are more than a match for the army of the imbecile White Queen! Take the news back with you, in peace. But if you refuse—" His close-set black eyes gleamed with sinister meaning. "If you refuse, you will not leave the kraal alive; your bones shall make feed for our dogs—all but the Britisher's bride! She shall remain with us, widowed in her youth, but not without honors! You will choose. Eat with us, *Inkosis*, then depart in peace, taking with you the fair one who slew him-who-roars-by-night!"

A murmur rose from the crowd at the strange words of the monarch. Three Zulu women appeared at the palace hut opening, each bearing a pair of large calabashes.

Elsie Wilbur had stepped from the cart beside Chuck White. Their eyes met; she realized now the meaning of Bertram's lie; there was no escaping the frightful portent of the black tyrant's words. I imagined that for once the young American must have wavered, since his worship of her was blind, unreasoning, desperate, and the means of her safety had been made plain.

As they faced each other, her eyes pleaded with him. "Oh, Teddy, we won't leave here without Jack, will we?" she asked earnestly, in a voice scarcely audible. "We'll die first!"

Chuck smiled grimly. "Sure, we'll take care of Jack." He turned as the Zulu women food-bearers approached our conveyances. "King, we'll eat a bite, to show we're good sports. But we're sure going to start something in about ten minutes if you don't deliver up that prisoner and talk crocodile!"

"Heavens, man—they're probably aiming to poison us!" from Jonathan Wilbur, huskily.

Prinsloo shook his great head. "No, they do not do things that way." His eyes went meaningly to the fighting men and the spears glinting in the sunlight.

TO THE threat of the young American the king of the Zulus apparently paid no heed. Instead he busied himself with preparations for the "feast," which, from appearances, was to be more of a meagre cold lunch than a dinner. Dinizulu had stepped again to his stone platform, and his fat features bore a calm smile of self-assurance. At his gesture the women approached our carts. The king spoke in quiet musical voice to our interpreter.

The Boer turned to us.

"He says we are his honored guests. We are to be received as befits foreign envoys, and he wants us to partake of *boyala* with him."

It was a sign of hospitality that we could not refuse without offering open insult to the king's dignity. Dinizulu stepped to the edge of the dais and extended both of his enormous arms in sign of welcome. Plainly the chieftain was a diplomat, and we as representatives of the white race dared not deny the amenities of common diplomacy, since we were being honored as ambassadors with a mission. To have remained in the vehicles would have been an affront terminating all negotiations then and there. Van der Merwe whispered as much to Chuck. "When in Zululand, we must do as the Zulus—"

"Sure, I'll bite. Guess that's the only way we can talk turkey!" Chuck was the first to step from the flivver, followed by Van der Merwe and Prinsloo from the cart. The Zulu women had backed away, motioning to the king. While Jonathan Wilbur and I followed, gesturing to Elsie to remain in the cart, the young American strode forward, helmet tilted on the back of his head, mounted the stone eminence, and grasped the hand of the king, shaking it vigorously. In turn we took the extended hand, and Chuck ordered Van der Merwe, Wilbur and me back into the car beside Elsie.

While our Basutos and the Zulu spectators looked on wonderingly, the first of the women mounted the dais with her calabashes; the other proceeded to the cart.

"If it's poison," groaned the exporter, "we're done!" As though in answer the monarch called the second woman back—perhaps he understood more English than he pretended. Dinizulu poised a tremendous calabash to his hands, and set it to his lips. With a gourd he drank from each of the vessels, then munched at the *mielie* meal and jerked blesbok which the women carried in their hands.

The second bearer returned to our cart. It was kafir, corn beer, *boyala*, that they were carrying in the calabashes. They proffered the gourds to each of us. We did not refuse. On the dais the young salesman and Prinsloo were served by the king.

"Drink her down!" chuckled the incorrigible Chuck, and followed the word with the deed.

"*Gezondheid!* Good health!" from the Boers. Elsie went through the motions, made a wry face at the odor. "Here's luck!" I remarked lamely and took a deep draught of the delicious, though somewhat heady, *boyala*. "H-m!" The Seattle capitalist passed his gourd for more.

On the stone platform Dinizulu drank liberally, then handed his gourd to the Zulu boy, who smacked his lips over the drink in a manner out of harmony with his princely dignity. The lad was rather handsome and well put together—I thought I had seen him somewhere before. But that was impossible.

While the woman servant passed the dried blesbok and meal, the tyrant of the Zulus smiled down on Chuck White condescendingly, and for the first time revealed that he had heard the American's words twenty minutes before, as conveyed by Prinsloo. "Does the young white hunter wish to talk about the Sacred Crocodile of the bosveld now?" he asked quietly, through the interpreter.

"In a minute, Chief." Chuck munched on the "jerky" meat. "Soon as we've done the honors, you'd better trot out the Englishman." He raised his voice. "Hey, Bertram, how you making it in that hut? Got you gagged?"

There was no reply from the *rondavel*. The Natal official was effectively silenced, for he must have heard the question. A glance revealed no connecting *kayas*, and if Bertram had been smuggled out some one of us in the carts would have seen it. The king laid a fat hand on Chuck's shoulder.

"You are going to depart now, *without the Britisher?*"

Chuck nodded at the Boer. "Tell the king he's a rotten guesser. We stick till Bertram comes out—and then some!"

If the monarch was either startled or enraged by this declaration, he did not reveal it. Seated on a rock stool he continued to feast and drink with his guests in placid enjoyment, as though giving them ample time to change their minds about the prisoner.

While accepting the hospitality of the king, all the time wondering what would follow next, we had not paid special attention to the massed assemblage in the kraal. But now I noticed that the civilians had been lined back far against the huts on every side, forming an open parade grounds in the center where stood the stiffly-drawn-up warriors of the *impi*. This work had been quietly done by the two *Indunas* left behind by their ruler.

"Good heavens, why don't we do something?" groaned the Seattle capitalist, at my elbow. "They'll have Jack hacked to pieces, in that hut! And what in thunder is that fool White rilin' up these devils by talkin' crocodile for?"

My own thoughts had been along somewhat the same lines. Yet my young American friend had had amazing luck so far in handling Dinizulu. Here we were in the royal kraal, surrounded for certain now by hostile tribesmen who had notified us we must die or leave Bertram at their mercy—and at the moment we were being feasted by the king himself. How long this would last, while Chuck continued to talk crocodile, was problematical. Not one of us except possibly the foolhardy American had a thought of the blue diamond any more.

ABRUPTLY the corpulent ruler set down his calabash, raised a hand and spoke in Zulu: "The king's guests shall be entertained!"

A slow movement among the warriors began at the east end of the kraal. Gradually a wave undulated in a semi-circle northwest. Our vehicles were perhaps twenty feet from the royal palace. Toward the intervening space a serpentine of the *impi* moved. Chuck White and Prinsloo sauntered back from the dais and rejoined us, where the view of the maneuvers was excellent. A word from Prinsloo told us we were about to witness the great Zulu spectacle, the regimental drill invented by the Black Napoleon, a magnificent scene seldom enjoyed by white men.

Before the *rondavel* the warriors closed ranks. The slow rhythm of the massed, glistening bodies increased rapidly, until every movement was covering wider range, with more ground traversed and more animation in the mass. Again the ranks parted, winged into a semi-circle, then a wide-flung serpentine, then suddenly a sharp break and the fighting men merged into phalanx formation. No finer bit of drilling had I ever seen. Myriads of muscular feet beat time on the hard ground of the kraal until the vibration of the throbbing bodies made the earth literally shake.

Even Chuck seemed fascinated at the sight. Van der Merwe had stepped from the cart into the flivver beside Prinsloo and the young salesman. The Boers exchanged looks that, I thought, showed a little uneasiness.

Again the *impi* opened in circular formation. My own thought was that Dinizulu was trying to impress us with his prowess to meet the British army. The king, the big *Induna* and the young prince looked on with undisguised admiration.

Abruptly the warriors began a backward and forward movement around and around us. It was more of a dance now than a military drill. They shook their assegais, points upward to the sun, and lowered the steel again to beat the spear blades against their shields.

At first the circle about us was many yards in diameter. Gradually it grew narrower.

Prinsloo and Van der Merwe had changed their position; they were seated back to back on the gasoline tanks in the rear of the touring car each with rifle in hand.

"Some show!" remarked Chuck, in genuine enjoyment.

Neither of the Boers replied. I felt Elsie Wilbur's hand on my arm, saw that she was holding her father with the other, while the exporter stared ahead in speechless awe. The vibration of the thumping feet increased as the circle narrowed. It was a terrifying thing.

"Retrief!" muttered Prinsloo grimly, facing our cart. His tone startled me. He leaned forward, reading the question I did not ask.

"Our great Voortrekker Retrief died like this. At the Royal Kraal Umkungunhlovu. He was King Dingaan's guest. He and his companions were murdered. Dingaan staged a war dance in his honor, and crushed him in the circle!"

Only real alarm would have made the veteran speak the fearsome words that must have been caught by the young girl beside me, as well as her excitable father. "The iron ring of Zulu warriors grew smaller and smaller until the assegais met and slew the whites! Make ready, friends—but wait until I speak!" Bitterness that seemed strange to Prinsloo was in his voice.

About us the myriad feet thumped until the ground trembled. Swiftly the ranks moved toward us on all sides. Spears flashed up and down. The dread of Zulu treachery seized me. The Basuto boys sat huddled close together in the cape-carts, overwhelmed with the fear of death. My rifle was on my knee. Jonathan Wilbur's florid features were frozen into a hard mask; his eyes were suddenly calm, determined. His daughter stooped low in the cart, and her hand seized the weapon that had slain the lion; it rose slowly. Chuck White alone seemed unmoved; he stood on the front seat of the car, hat on the back of his head, chewing at his cigar, eyes calmly on Dinizulu. I turned my gaze to the Zulu tyrant, and saw him raise his hand.

"*Bulala! Bulala!*" rose above the din from a thousand throats.

" 'Kill! Kill!' they are saying," hissed Prinsloo, between hard-set teeth. Spears flashed high. Van der Merwe crouched.

"*Skiet!* Shoot!" spat the Boer.

I HAVE been in a number of tight places, but never in a fix like this. With all our guns we could not have stopped the savages more than a minute, for they were a band of steel about us and so close that they could have assegaied us with a score of blade points while we fired.

While the word "Shoot!" hung on the lips of Van der Merwe as the signal to Prinsloo, Chuck White leaped before them. At a single bound he was on the ceremonial stone facing the king.

"Dinizulu!" The sharp, clear voice of the American pierced the bedlam like a bell. His jaunty, lackadaisical mien had vanished; he was standing erect and alert before the monarch of all the Zulus, feet well apart, his slim youthful figure vibrant with reserve force. Every man of us paid unconscious tribute to his courage, or sublime effrontery, call it what you will.

But it was not his voice or attitude that stayed the assegais of the Zulus. It was the thing that he held in his hand.

It was a large band of gold, thin gold, and wide, the circumference of a man's skull.

The spears of the savages remained poised, and a thousand questioning eyes turned to the king.

Dinizulu's features had tensed in rage at the white youth's leap beside him on the dais—rage at the interruption that had denied his blood-lust. But quickly his anger melted into amazement as his eyes rested upon the ring of gold.

"One word before you go on with this show!" sang out the salesman, holding the ring aloft, almost tauntingly before the eyes of the monarch.

Dinizulu, frozen where he stood at sight of the golden ornament, spoke no word, nor did he move his arms in signal to his *Indunas*. I was almost amused at the dramatic fixedness of his demeanor. But now his little black pig eyes fairly blazed in avid curiosity. Slowly he leaned forward, closer to the white man, his gaze riveted upon the talisman.

The dancing and shouting had come to an end. Phrase by phrase the Boer carried the words of the American to the chieftain:

"Lucky for you, King, O son of Cetewayo, as they call you, that you didn't get away with this little trick! In the first place, you're going to release Bertram; he's here for the Great White Queen, whose servant is the Governor of Natal, and if you had touched any of us with those jabbers, you'd have the government of Britain on your necks. In the second place, *I'm* here as the servant of a gent named Uncle Sam, beyond the great water—the United States of America! There are other Americans here, including the white bride and her father. The Great White Queen knows we're here, and so does your Uncle Sam, and if anything happens—look out!"

Which was a downright exaggeration, but a mighty effective one. I fancied I could see the king wince, for it knocked from his head all notion that we could be made way with without the outside world knowing our fate.

"Now to business. We're big *Malagati*. Workers of magic. Got that big crocodile skinned forty ways in that game!"

Chuck held the band of gold close to the face of the king—near enough that the monarch might see the inner rim. Fascinated, Dinizulu gazed on the symbol markings on the concave side.

His fat jowls drew down and his orbs seemed to bore through the very substance of the circle. And while he stood there as one transfixed, the elder *Induna* beside the king, wise in the lore of his people, burst forth in a cry of mingled astonishment and alarm:

"*Bayete! Bayete!* It is the ring from the great-one-that-dwells-in-the-sacred-pool himself! The band of royalty swallowed by the great-one at the infant sacrifice! It is the golden talisman of Dabulamanzi!" He prostrated himself before the monarch, and every warrior within the kraal sank to the dust on his hands and knees.

"The royal band of gold!" continued the *Induna*. "All these many suns it has slept in the belly of the great-spirit-of-Chaka. And now the white devils have slain the sacred one! Dinizulu, O son of Cetewayo, we await thy command for vengeance!"

The great-one-in-the-pool slain? Dinizulu seemed not to comprehend. Yet he had heard. He turned his little eyes on Chuck, who had been standing carelessly, hands thrust in his pockets, as the babble went on. The king, his fat fingers trembling, reached for the talisman. But the American drew it back banteringly, and puffed tranquilly at his cigar.

Dinizulu whirled imperiously on his *Induna*.

"Vengeance! It shall be taken on the warriors who guard the sacred pool! *Hamba!* Go! Bring the guards of the black-water before me!"

The messengers were gone like frightened deer. Dinizulu's heavy lips folded back ferociously over ivory teeth.

"If the Ama-Boer have slain the great-one-that-dwells-with-Chaka, they shall die quickly!"

Now loomed into view from among the *impi* the giant *Induna*, the chieftain we had met in the *bosveld*. He had laid aside his stiff dignity in his present agitation.

"O Dinizulu, son of Cetewayo, it is not so. The Sacred Crocodile still lives! Every moment since the sun set last night I have followed the white jackals with my eyes. They have not been near the sacred pool. The ring they show cannot be the talisman. They are impostors!" He gestured in contempt toward us.

Dinizulu, torn by hate and fear, heard the words as the music of stringed calabashes. His eyes sought the band of gold hungrily. Chuck thrust it forth obligingly. Before the king's very nose it hung. The monarch needed no proof that he was looking upon the talisman—the beaten gold, the product of Phœnician crucibles, marked on the inner rim with the engravings of royal elephants and scores of minute leopards, lions and crocodiles. Too often had Dinizulu in his youth fondled the ring of Dabulamanzi not to know it.

"Looks natural, doesn't it, King?" chuckled the American.

Dinizulu turned on his chieftain.

"The *Induna* lies!" he thundered at his henchman. "It is the ring from the belly of the great-one-that-dwells-in-the-pool!"

"What are they arguing about now?" Chuck wanted to know, while the Boer strove to keep pace with the words. We turned our heads at a murmur from the crowd in the kraal.

The messengers had made a speedy trip, revealing that the pool was near the village; they broke through the circle of warriors, running like the wind.

"The great-one still lives!" the spokesman called to the king, prostrating himself. I watched Dinizulu and I saw his lips quiver.

"Enough!" roared the monarch. "I have seen it. It is magic. Let the white men speak!"

"That's the first sensible yap I've heard out of you today, King!" chortled Chuck, hitching at his belt and straightening up with a grin. "We're big medicine-men," he reiterated, as one addressing an old bosom friend in confidence. "We've come to skin the crocodile and take along the big blue stone. What say?"

Prinsloo translated the reckless words into Zulu as nearly as it was possible. He seemed to have succeeded fairly well, for there was a swift transformation in the king's fat face. Like a cloud, a flood of hate overspread his features and his temples went red with rage—all the pent-up anger of the Zulu for the white invader and the one who defiles the most sacred symbols of his religion.

"*Bulala!* Kill the dogs!" the king thundered, rising to his full height and lifting his arm in signal.

The next few seconds saw more action than I had ever seen packed in so short a space of time. While the two *Indunas* on the dais laid hold of Chuck, who had foolishly gone forth weaponless, the *impi* of warriors swept down on us like a swarm of locusts. So sudden was the attack that I was knocked from my feet before I could use my rifle and Van der Merwe and Prinsloo fired but one shot each, for I heard the reports. Jonathan Wilbur let out a shriek "Butchery!" Elsie was jerking up her weapon, and I saw an assegai flashing down upon me where I lay.

AND then something happened. I heard a voice, deep, thunderous, imperative. A sudden and awe-inspiring silence overspread the kraal. The spear halted above my breast, in mid-air. The voice I had heard was that of Umjala the Zulu.

I got to my feet to find our big black guide standing in the dusty touring car. King Dinizulu's eyes were bulging, his rotund features tensed, strained, amazed. A single word Umjala had uttered, which I did not understand, for Prinsloo was doing no interpreting at this stage.

Our guide, revealed in all the regalia of an *Induna* of high rank, stood at his full stature a magnificent *kaross* of leopard skins draped across his shoulders. He threw back the toga, presenting a splendid figure of a man, a real Zulu "father-of-a-household."

King Dinizulu's head was thrust forward, his fingers outspread against his fat knees, his little eyes staring, unblinking. Suddenly I heard him utter a command, and in another moment the warriors were trotting back from the cape-carts. We were again left in the center of the circle, wholly unmolested and for the time being absolutely safe. The rifles of the Boers, remarkably enough and luckily for us, had done no more damage than to wound one of the natives slightly, the other bullet striking a spear blade.

On the dais remained Chuck, an amazing spectacle of cool nerve. In some way he had managed to retain hold of the golden band during the scuffle, and now he was shaking and dusting himself, like a rooster priming his feathers. One could not grow angry at him, even knowing how nearly he had spoiled the whole show for us—for Umjala was not slated to appear from the flivver until Chuck gave the word. But that was Chuck, foolhardy and reckless, not knowing or caring about the most sacred traditions of the Zulus; and while the natives had their eyes fastened on Umjala in the touring car the salesman promptly stole the show again and took the center of the stage. He had lifted the helmet from where it had fallen and stuck it jauntily back over one ear. Raising his arms for attention he addressed Dinizulu.

"Recollect the battle of Rorke's Drift,

King—where your father's great *Induna* and friend, Umjala, was killed—shot through the gizzard and bayoneted a couple of times? Well, we've brought the dead man back to life. Yep, we're big medicine men, all right!" He pointed to the superb figure of his black co-conspirator.

Dinizulu's fat jaw sagged and his jet eyes shone wildly at the marvel before him, where stood the slain *Induna* and hero (slain so far as the chronicles of the natives were concerned), now come back to life after eighteen years.

Fighting men of the *impi* bent to the ground. Assegais were lowered before the *Induna* Umjala, come from the realm of death.

"Oh, Teddy—you are wonderful!" It was Elsie, comprehending the effect of the dramatic ruse vaguely, sensing that somehow the young American had turned the tables. "Make him release Jack!"

"Coming to that!" Chuck turned to the king. "Tote out our friend, the Englishman!"

The king's eyes contracted strangely as Prinsloo made the meaning clear. His gaze went to Elsie Wilbur, to Umjala, to Chuck White, in turn. Suddenly he frowned. He shot out rapid words to Umjala that Prinsloo did not, could not, translate, for they were meaningless sounds to any other tongue than the Zulu, designed to test the reality of Umjala's return to life with symbolical illusions of the inner councils of his people. And then, while the natives gazed in rapt attention on the scene, Chuck laid down his trump card.

"We've got this 'Croc' Chaka's number," he said cheerfully, and Prinsloo floundered around in great shape translating it. "Yep, we've chased out the spirit of the Evil One, the Black Napoleon, from the sacred baby-eater. *We've got with us the biggest baby he ever made a meal of!*"

Here Chuck tossed away his helmet and carelessly stuck the golden band about his forehead.

"Got a good memory, King? Recall the babe Umhloza? The twin that was fed to the monster of the blackwater of the Sacred Pool? Brother of the young prince standing there beside you? Twin brother, you recollect, and a little older than that kid—couple hours, maybe! Recall when Nomazolo tossed him into the pool? You were only a young prince then yourself. Ah, I see—you were on hand at that little wake, Chief! Well, have a look!"

From his hiding place in the cape-cart stepped Umhloza, known to us as Breakfast, a spotted *kaross* thrown across his shoulders. He swung down to the dust of the kraal, strode forward toward the king and in careful, well-coached dignity, mounted to the stone dais to the side of the twin prince.

"Here he is," sang out the young American, blithely. "Umhloza, the babe that was eaten by the crocodile—come to life again to say howdy to his brother. They're such dead ringers that they won't know which is which themselves!"

IN INDENTICAL garb (Umjala had looked out for that) the twins faced the monarch. There was a subdued murmur throughout the kraal; the king and his *Indunas* on the dais stood in a daze, eyes roving wildly at this evidence of *Matagati* witchcraft. Slowly the king roused himself, crouched forward stealthily, and gingerly placed his fat hand on the shoulders of the reincarnated twin prince. He stepped back hastily and squatted on the stone, almost cowering.

Now arose from the crowd a chant of weird fervor, differing from the song of warriors in battle, but more powerfully emotional than anything we had yet heard. The very air throbbed with the tense uncanniness of it. Thousands of impulses bred of generations of superstition were surging through that mass of warriors and civilians, among men, women and children.

Dinizulu, last king of the Zulus, sat with face averted, eyes furtively darting from right to left; he seemed on the verge of flight. No trace of hatred remained in his face—only the bewildering emotions of one who had seen miracles. To him it must have seemed that we had left only the husk of the sacred *kaaiman*, since we had filched from the crocodile's belly both the golden ring and the twin babe, now grown to young manhood. And, to tell the truth, the stunt as Chuck pulled it would have puzzled a lot wiser heads than the Zulus in the heart of the enchanted Umvoti. I have no doubt that if the young New Yorker had demanded it at that moment the natives would have gone out and brought back the hide of the crocodile, blue stone and all. If we could get a dead man alive from the pool, and a boy and a band of gold from the inside of the beast, nothing could stop us from hocus-pocusing the diamond from the hide, anyway. Besides, the Zulu strongbox was worthless now, since the white men knew about it.

But Chuck did not ask for the diamond, just then. Instead, he repeated his demand for the release of the Englishman. And King Dinizulu, with a gesture and a word, sent a messenger within the *rondavel*. In another moment Bertram was on the dais, gazing about him with a smile of complacency and lighting a fresh cigaret. "Knew jolly well they wouldn't dare harm a subject of the queen," he drawled, and yawned. He turned to the king. "By George, my wife and friends will be saying good-by to you now, Your Highness!" He stepped down, took his place in the flivver.

"Not yet!" snapped the young salesman. He dangled the golden ring before the eyes of the Zulu ruler. "King, what say we swap? You need this in your business. We need the blue stone!"

"For the love of Pete!" It was Jonathan Wilbur, gesticulating from the cape-cart. "Come on—out of here, White! And let well enough alone, before these barbarians—!"

"Tell him what I said, Prinsloo!" cut in Chuck. "We want the diamond, and we'll make an even swap for this bauble." Prinsloo communicated the message. The king's gaze was on Umjala and Umhloza, in turn. His sparse, oily brows contracted in thought. Finally he gave answer:

"The white men are great *Matagati*, but they ask too much. The Ama-Zulu have sworn that the blue stone shall ever remain the property of their people." He cut off, raised a hand and motioned to our giant Zulu guide.

Umjala approached him on the dais. Low words were spoken. After a time our guide turned smiling eyes on Chuck.

"The king say the diamond must always be the property of his people. Many times it served for the coronation and the wedding of princes, before the white man come. Now he say: diamond shall go to the great *Matagati*, for wedding present! Boss Bertram, he and the lady be married again, Zulu-fashion. Boss Bertram, he be 'dopted into tribe, made great medicine-man. Then the diamond be given to the white lady, for present!"

"Great Scott!" Jonathan Wilbur waved his arms. "Elsie don't want any damned diamond! We want to get out of here! Come on—"

"But the king insists," smiled Umjala. "The Boss Bertram and the lady be married Zulu-fashion. He be glad to give the blue diamond to the Zulu bride—she be Zulu too when Boss Bertram he made Zulu medicine-man—"

"By George, that won't do—unless Elsie is willing!" blurted the Englishman. "I'm game—I'll be the medicine-man—but such a ceremony will be *legal*, in South Africa. Elsie, I'm jolly well anxious—but—"

"What's all this?" Prinsloo wanted to know. The king had muttered a word of questioning and doubt to his chief *Induna*. Umjala caught the drift immediately.

"The king say: 'What is the meaning of this, if the lady afraid to marry this man? Is she not the Britisher's bride?' "

Jonathan Wilbur paled, and Bertram winced. Chuck White's jaw hardened. Plainly enough he would have given up all thought of carrying back the blue diamond then and there rather than have it known that a lie had been told about Elsie Wilbur being a married woman—to spare her being taken into the tribe as a marriageable white maiden.

"Sure!" Chuck ejaculated, with mock cheeriness. "Sure, the Englishman will have another ceremony performed!" He directed rapid words to Elsie: "You were going to marry him anyway, Elsie! You've got to do it now—to save yourself. It isn't the diamond we care a whoop about, either. All our magic might not save you if the king finds out we hoaxed him about your being a married lady—doggone it, I can't tell you why! But it's up to you to go through with the ceremony, Elsie. Give the king the word you'll do it!"

I pitied the poor little devil, making this bold appeal to her to marry his rival, because I knew well enough how hard it was for him to do it. Chuck would never have done it but for the misleading words of Bertram a few hours before, when the Englishman declared he and Elsie were to have been married anyway and that he was merely announcing it prematurely for the benefit of the savages. Elsie's surprised question, of course, had told Chuck that the couple were not yet man and wife; but the salesman could not have doubted that the girl had actually accepted the hand of the government man.

Of course the whole thing was resolving itself about the girl's personal safety among the Zulus. Chuck might risk anything to get possession of the blue diamond—anything up to life itself—but he was not ready to risk Elsie for all the diamonds in existence.

The vivacious little huntress looked puzzled; she did not assent to Chuck's request, immediately; but her alert dark eyes were wide as her look challenged the young American. Jonathan Wilbur had grown serious, anxious, a little dubious about the whole performance, judging from his grave expression. "What about this, Bertram?" he demanded, rather sharply. "You think it's really necessary?"

"My word, yes! For Elsie's sake." Bertram nodded quickly, nervously fingering his cigaret. "If we don't go through with it, they'll jolly well think she's a candidate for adoption into the tribe, and—"

"Better do it, Pet!" The exporter pressed his daughter's hand. "Yeh! You intended marrying Bertram anyway—I know you did! Come to think of it, you've got to do it, Pet! Great Scott, it'll save all of us, not counting yourself—" His eyes rolled. "Promise—"

"Very well." The little vixen laughed merrily, as though she enjoyed the promise of a lark. "Where is the Zulu preacher?"

EVENING found us still clustered about the flivver and cape-carts, awaiting the diamond and the ceremony. It had been an afternoon of entertainment and excitement, without the menace of the previous few hours. The afternoon was given over to festival, honors were showered on Umjala and Breakfast, and Chuck had been singled out for great tribute as the miracle-working magician. Our big black guide, now the *Induna* Umjala, had chatted much with the king, and if there had been any doubt about Chuck raising Umjala and Breakfast from the dead, it was dispelled as the hours advanced and these two blacks mingled with their own people in the flesh.

The Zulu *impi* had staged a dance-of-triumph, this time flourishing assegais and shields in more friendly fashion. Breakfast strutted about in great self-approbation while we were content to sit around and watch the show. Songs were sung throughout the day, the natives commemorating the morning's events in those typical, interminable compositions, in monotonous tones, that constitute the epics of the Zulu race. Before the *rondavel* of Dinizulu the chief medicine-man chanted:

Great Matagati are the white men;
They come from over the great water,
These white men who obey a woman,
And those who obey the son of Washington;
They were called by the spirit of the Black-One
That lives in the deep water;
And behold, to Dinizulu they bring
The Golden Ring,
The Ring of long-dead Dabulamanzi;
Aai! Great *Matagati* are the white men,
Who can slay from afar!

Chuck White tried to maintain a cheerful exterior; but I read him like a book; he was gloomy, in despair, in spite of his affected hilarity as the dancers kow-towed and grimaced before him and called him the great medicine-man.

Umjala remained aloof from us, giving the impression he had again become a close confidant and lieutenant of the king. Messengers had been sprinting back and forth through the kraal to the bush; but we had seen no trace as yet of the diamond.

Toward sunset a sudden hush fell over the kraal. The chief medicine-man, in *moocha*, *kaross*, and ebony ring about his head—he was seventy or more in spite of his jet black hair—mounted the stone platform before the palace hut; he raised his hand for attention as a pair of swift runners emerged from the bush. The medicine-man's wrinkled countenance broke in a smile as his eyes went to Elsie Wilbur. He intoned low, guttural words. Umjala, beside him, gestured toward us.

"The lady—she come—now!"

Elsie Wilbur had been in genuinely gay spirits through the afternoon, chatting with her father and Bertram, exclaiming about the weird dancing, the processions and singing, laughing lightly at the antics of riders performing tricks on the backs of the oxen while little boys mimicked their elders riding goats and cows. Now suddenly she sobered, went quickly to the side of Chuck White.

The young American had stayed away from her, pretending to be disinterested in the forthcoming marriage, except as we all were interested in seeing the thing over with. He had been sitting in the dust beside me for two hours, making droll comments about the show we were witnessing. Elsie came to him now, and without drawing him away from me, asked laughingly:

"You don't care if I do marry Jack, do you, Teddy?"

"Why not?" he retorted, in mock surprise.

"Oh, I thought, perhaps, since Jack says the ceremony will be legal, recognized throughout South Africa—I thought perhaps, since *you* suggested I marry Mr. Bertram—why, I thought you might at least congratulate me!"

Chuck rose quickly, went aside with her, while the medicine-man waited, and while King Dinizulu made gesture to the women calabash-bearers and a procession of Zulu maidens to come forward. The medicine-man's lips moved, uttering a low chant that continued for some minutes. Dinizulu squatted on the stone dais; his example was followed by the maidens and the women calabash-bearers, the two *Indunas* and Umjala. The boy prince appeared at the doorway of the hut, sat beside the ruler, and Umjala with a word summoned the twin brother Breakfast, who seated himself beside the prince. With the medicine-man alone standing, chanting and moving his arms in rhythmic sidewise motion, Umjala explained the part we were to play in the ceremony. All males but the father of the bride were to come forward with the bridegroom; Jonathan Wilbur was to bring up his daughter just as in a Christian marriage service. Elsie Wilbur yielded to her father's arm, and the two walked up the stone stairs. The exporter's usually genial countenance was exceedingly serious.

"Now!" Umjala motioned to Bertram. "Now the husband come!"

Chuck White stood at the head of our procession; he puffed furiously at a freshly-lit cigar; his helmet was jammed down over his ears and his hands were in his pockets. He whirled on Prinsloo:

"Ask his Nibs if he's ready to hand over the diamond, Prinz old boy!"

The Boer raised his sonorous voice. Dinizulu, with a smile, lifted a hand from his *kaross*. In it sparkled the cut stone, a brilliant fashioned by ancient diamond-cutters; a gem the size of a hen's egg that made the eyes of all of us literally bulge. Chuck White grinned, stretched forth a hand which held the talisman of engraved gold, the ring of Zulu royalty. "Don't forget we're big medicine-men, King," he drawled. "It's an even swap; the ring is yours when the bride gets her wedding present. That all plain?"

PRINSLOO asked the question and the king nodded gravely. At this juncture, the Englishman, somewhat impatiently, strode forward in the lead, and before Chuck could halt him darted up upon the platform, beside Elsie Wilbur.

"Come on!" Chuck was a second behind him, and we followed. The chant of the medicine-man grew louder, more rapid, excited. He raised both hands high above his head, and hummed low words.

"He asks you if you take this man for husband?" interpreted Prinsloo.

"Yes, *this* one." Elsie Wilbur placed her right hand in that of Chuck White, standing on the side opposite Bertram. "Oh, Jack," she added, hastily, contritely, "I'm sorry, but Teddy and I had planned to be married, right along!"

"Thunderation!" Jonathan Wilbur's features registered astonishment. "What's this? Young White! Great Scott!" His jaw fell; he gazed at Bertram, questioningly, then bent his eyes on his daughter's upturned, smiling face. "You mean this, Pet? It's legal, mind you—no backing out—heavens—"

"That's why I am willing to go through with it, Daddy, *because it is Teddy.*" Her left hand pressed that of the florid, excited exporter, whose gaze darted on the young American. "By jingoes! We can't back out now!"

King Dinizulu had risen; he commanded sharply of Umjala to explain the meaning of the argument. Prinsloo made haste to set things right.

"Has the king misunderstood? The American is the great *Matagai* and *he* and the young lady are the bride and groom."

"Of course!" thundered the king, his fat features flexing impatiently. He spoke in Zulu, and Prinsloo made his words plain. "I know the truth about whose bride the young white woman is! In the *rondavel*, when the Englishman was my prisoner, he told me the truth—when we were about to kill him. He said if we killed him, the white woman would not be widowed—that she was the bride of the American! So why do the *Matagati* hesitate?"

"Hesitate?" Chuck White chuckled. "We're waiting on your big medicine-man preacher to go ahead with the show, King. Speed her up!"

Dinizulu nodded, smiled, as the Boer communicated the words; he motioned to the medicine-man. Jonathan Wilbur gave away the bride and in another moment the ceremony was ended. In the hand of the bride the king placed the great blue stone, and from the young American he received the band of gold. The king made a speech, interpreted for us, in which he designated with many expressions of pride the bride and groom as daughter and son of the Ama-Zulu.

The women of the calabashes poured *boyala*, while hundreds of throats called forth tribute to the "Great-Little-*Matagati*-from-the-land-of-Washington." Night saw a big feast in honor of all of us. Bullocks were slain with assegais, the warm blood was caught by the women with calabash gourds and drunk on the spot. The lowing of the doomed cattle, the chants of the savages plying their dripping spears, the flicker of huge fires, were enough to give us a new feeling of uneasiness, for the smell of the warm blood seemed to excite the Zulus into a frenzy. But Umjala assured us our reputation as magicians was secure. We were plied with roasted beef, *mielie* meal and *maas*, curdled milk, until we were glad to be shown the guest hut.

"Whew! Now what if they decide to keep you here, as members of this plagued tribe!" exclaimed the Seattle exporter, as we rolled in our blankets.

"They won't," declared Chuck, cheerfully. "And as for the diamond, Umjala says the king would swap a dozen of them for that royal band of gold. Go to sleep!"

Bertram said not a word. I was not satisfied as to his motive in telling the Zulus while a prisoner that Chuck and not he was the bridegroom of the party—did not know whether he had told the story to save himself or Elsie. I gave him the benefit of the doubt. In the morning at daybreak Chuck piled into the flivver with Elsie at his side, and they still had their wedding present. Dinizulu announced that Umjala should be our special escort out of Zululand with a body of warriors. Breakfast protested at being left behind, and was allowed to join us with the promise that he would return after going to Johannesburg to take a bride in the "Kaffir Location." Umjala never intended to return; but Breakfast preferred the honors of his people to being mess boy on the Rand.

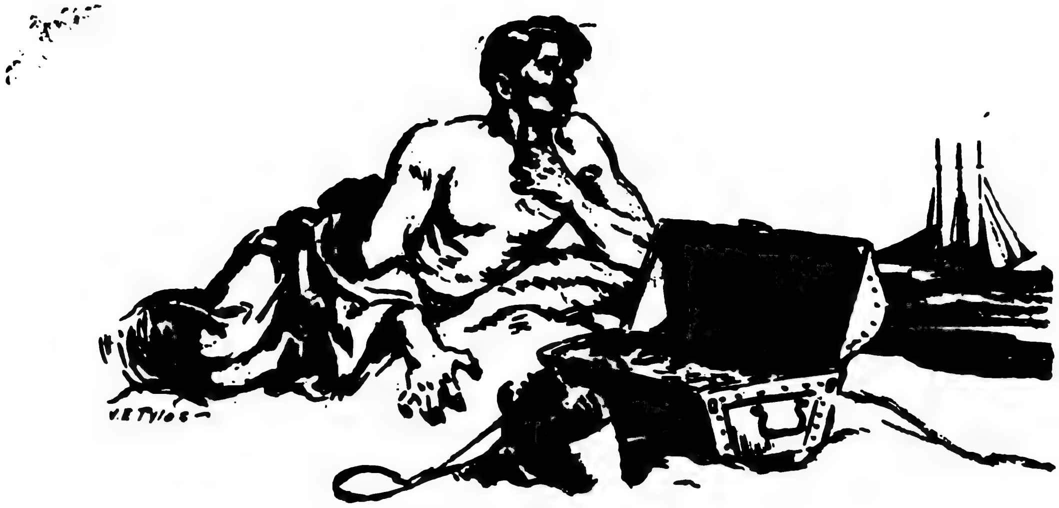
WE REACHED the Umvoti and Natal without incident save the touching parting of *Induna* Umjala and the Zulu warriors. No I. D. B. trouble was anticipated, since the diamond was found out of syndicate territory. When Chuck and Elsie, with Jonathan Wilbur, sailed for the States a week later, after a quiet wedding ceremony in Durban, they took the diamond with them, after the Seattle exporter had made a fair divvy in cash. Umjala, made rich by Wilbur's generosity, remained on the Rand, predicting that Dinizulu would soon inaugurate a rising, which he did, resulting in the last king of the Zulus being made a British prisoner.

That ended our quest for the Beast of the Bosveld; I had been cheated out of a shot at the crocodile, due to Chuck's plagued maneuvering--but I had no word of criticism for him, nor did my friends, the Boers. He had proved that American resourcefulness, wit, luck and daring could surmount most trying obstacles.

I saw Van der Merwe a year later.

"At the big Zulu *Indaba* at Eshowe," he said, "where the governor of Natal was addressing the natives, I ran across the boy Breakfast. He was arrayed in all the accoutrements of a high *Induna*. Breakfast liked the prince rôle after all and I guess he made most of the honors showered on him as the babe who came to life after eighteen years."

On the same day I received a letter from Chuck White. He had gone back to selling automobiles in Seattle, in spite of the Wilbur fortune and the big blue diamond. "Nix," he wrote, "the gem you saw offered for sale in New York for $300,000 is not our wedding present! That stone couldn't be bought for a million."



Water

A Brief and Tragic Tale

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

TUG IRONS handspiked the anchor from the bow and the schooner swung to rest, stemming a strong tide which swirled greasily around and past Knucklebone Cay. A blazing sun looked down upon the cay, yellow sand and bald faced rock. Neither life nor verdure existed there. The sun blazed down on the bleached deck of the schooner; scarred planks marred with stains. Some of the stains worried Timmy Goff. He was preparing the only boat for launching when Irons came from the windlass. He looked up, and his Adam's apple rose and fell.

"Can't we hide them stains a bit, Tug?"

"What for? Nobody here to see 'em," growled Tug.

"When we go—"

"Wait 'til then. Got everything in the boat? You're sure this is the cay, ain't you?"

"I got a picture. Here." Goff shuddered and passed over a soiled and dimmed old photograph. He let go of it as if he were glad to let go. It was a poor view of a little low cay on a placid sea. It could not be mistaken for anything other than the barren little bit of desert now in sheer view.

"Come on, then. Let's dig," growled Tug, eying his comrade with contempt.

The boat put off. There was a small jug of water, one of rum, a handkerchief with biscuit and cheese, a pick and shovel. The sun beat down like a furnace blast. Tug rowed. He sweat. Timmy Goff shivered, but sweat too. The tide sang past the schooner's taut cable. It hummed past the shore. At the windward edge of the cay the tide piled up in a foamless ridge, splitting and rushing past the smooth rock like oil. On all that limited expanse of sand and rock no twig, or splinter, or blade could be seen. The great ocean current which set past it was too swift to leave flotsam there. If any piece of wood, or floating thing, came there, it was whirled aside by the fierce tides and carried far away into more quiescent waters.

"Gawd! I'd hate to fall into that!" muttered Timmy, his eyes fastened in fascination on the swirling water against which Tug Irons pulled savagely. A piece of plank came by. It seemed about to touch the beach. Ten yards away it paused, shot sideways, and sailed like a javelin past the islet.

"Better watch yerself, then. I can't swim either," growled Tug. With terrific labor the boat was forced out of the current and into a smooth eddy at the lee side. Silently the men took the things out of her. When the boat was made fast, Tug looked about him, and told his mate:

"If you have to go off to the schooner, watch out you get into the lee here when you land. You'll get washed away to Mexico if you don't."

"I ain't going in no boat, not alone I ain't," mumbled Goff, with a show of spirit. Tug Irons laughed, picking up part of the load. They went to the very middle of the cay. Irons stuck the pick deep into the sand.

"Let's look at them notes again," he said.

There was treasure on Knucklebone Cay. Timmy Goff knew. He had been cook of the schooner before, when she came to the Cay and her master started to dig. A hurricane had driven them off; but there was no doubt about the treasure. Timmy told his old crony, Tug Irons, about it, and Tug took a job in the schooner on the presumption of being a clever pilot. Knucklebone Cay was far too perilous a spot for ships to come nigh. Once in a while a steamer passed not too far away for her smoke to be seen from the middle of the sandy hummock. But nothing ever sighted it if it could be avoided. The fine old murderer who planted the treasure there at first must have anticipated that.

Now Tug Irons and Timmy Goff were right on the spot. It had been timid Timmy's idea to murder the schooner's owner and his mate. That was why he took Tug into his confidence. And now that the treasure was theirs to find and the schooner was theirs to sail away in, Tug Irons had no notion of sharing anything more than the labor with Timmy Goff. Something of the kind, vaguely feared, was responsible for the ratlike grin on Timmy's face as he started digging at Tug's peremptory order.

"Turn about diggin', Tug. It's my lay," Timmy grumbled.

"G'wan, dig!" snarled Tug.

THE rum was fine for stimulating flagging muscles. Tug found it fine to stimulate imagination. He knew what he wanted, did Tug. When he got that treasure all to himself, Timmy safely out of the way, the schooner sunk or burned somewhere near enough to civilization for him to escape in the boat, he'd cut a swath, he'd make a splurge, he'd show 'em.

"Give us a spell," panted Timmy, straightening his aching back. Tug was looking down upon him, thinking how easy it would be to use a shovel or a pick on that laboring back. He drew his breath sharply. Timmy might have the same idea.

"G'wan, dig!" he said. "I'll give y' a spell when I've got these notes all in me mind. Here, have a drop o' rum."

The sun rose past meridian. The rocks and the sand were too hot to touch. Timmy, sullenly throwing out sand that was cooler than the surface soil, felt as if his marrow were frying. The sand got heavier. Every shovelful burned the blisters on his hands. He came to something that was not sand. He uttered a queer sound that made Tug Irons peer into the hole. The find was nothing more than a broken pick head. Left perhaps by the men who had put the treasure there. But it seemed to prove they were on the right track. Timmy flung the old pick out, bending again to his digging. He had meant to quit. Now he wanted to go on.

"Hey, look out where yer throwin' things!" said Tug huskily. "You broke the water jug wi' that pick. Lucky it wasn't the rum. Here, let me into that hole. I'll dig a bit."

"I'll dig. Keep out!"

Timmy Goff felt something solid and metallic under his shovel. It was no débris this time. A shovelful revealed an iron box. Timmy's teeth gleamed. He would finish the digging himself now. He was not going to let Tug ride over him. Whose treasure was it, anyhow?

"Come on. Get out!" snarled Tug again, and leaped down into the hole beside Timmy. Pick and shovel were both there. Tug had hurled the broken pick into the sea when he believed it might possibly have broken the rum jug. Timmy was aching and weary. He wanted to fight Tug then, but knew he must lose. Tug's tone did not reassure him either. He began to be afraid. As he crawled out of the hole and painfully straightened up, his broody eyes caught a feather of smoke on the horizon miles distant. Of the steamer itself there was not a sign: no slender mast, no dot of smokestack. And the cay reflected heat like a furnace. His throat was parched. There was no water. He kicked at the broken jug.

Shrewdly he estimated the chances of jumping Tug. His inborn cowardice warned him that he would have to make a good job of it at first onset, or Tug would strangle him with his bare hands. There was a gun on the schooner. Tug must have forgotten it, as Timmy had, in the fever to get ashore. If he only had that, now. Tug worked desperately. He had uncovered the iron box. The earth had settled about it since it was buried, almost as hard as cement. No question about it, Tug Irons was in deadly earnest over his job. Timmy Goff shivered. Maybe he would never set hands on that iron box.

"Won't I!" he whimpered, half aloud. Tug looked up.

"Won't wot?" he snarled.

"I didn't say nothing, Tug," Timmy whined. "I was just thinkin' I'd go off and get some water from the schooner. Ain't you thirsty, Tug?"

"Rum's good enough for me. Go get yer water."

"Don't open it 'til I get back, will you, Tug?"

TUG bent again to his picking and prying. Timmy almost ran to the boat. If he could even get the boat off shore, he could bring Tug to terms. But then, Tug was as strong as the devil. A desperate brute too. Timmy shivered at the thought of how he had handled the skipper and the mate. Just like killing rabbits. No, it would be much safer to have the gun.

Timmy Goff worried the boat afloat. He let the tide take him clear, conserving his strength. Then he rowed out to the schooner, filled another jug with water, and drank a big pannikin of rum to nerve himself for the rest of the job. He planned it all as he pulled back to the cay. Only desperation gave him strength to negotiate that fierce tide. He felt the pull of it at his oars. The boat slithered broadside on, turned, and bucked; but he forced it down into the leeward eddy of the cay with tight teeth and throbbing temples. He would beach the boat, call Tug to lend a hand, pass him the water jug, and kill him as he took it, at such close quarter it would be impossible to miss. It had to be impossible to miss. Timmy knew that. As he ran the boat in, he saw the last film of smoke disappear from the horizon. That was as near as any human being was likely to come to Knucklebone Cay for a long time. Tug Irons might lay in the sun and the sand until doomsday. Timmy would be far away and in clover.

Tug was out of the hole, standing quite near, his hands cupped before him, his eyes blazing with treasure lust. Timmy held up the water jug; but his lips never uttered the words that were the decoy Tug to his doom. The sun glittered on Tug's cupped hands. He had found the treasure! He had it there in his hands. It was doubtful if he saw the boat, or Timmy, at all. But Timmy saw him. Cackling dryly, the blood pounding at his temples, Timmy stepped on the bow of the boat, the jug smashing as it fell on the gunwale. He tried to shout. His throat was unaccountably parched. He trembled. He slipped. Tug heard him shout as he fell from the smooth rock into the swirling current that bore him away. Then Tug laughed. Just once Timmy's hand reached up from the terrific tide, still clutching the gun. Tug had not given Timmy credit for so much guts.

"Th' little squirt meant to croak me and hog the stuff!" he chuckled. He could afford to laugh. There he stood, his hands full of glittering gems. In the iron box at his feet were more; many, many more; wealth to buy— Oh, money could buy anything on earth. He knew a place back home where delicious women were at the beck and call of money, and Tug licked his thick lips at the memory of some he had seen when from the outside he had once looked in.

"He didn't need no water!" he rasped. "He only made that an excuse for gettin' the gun to bump me off with. Double-crossin' a pal! Th' sucker!"

He stooped, dropping his handfuls of gems and picking up others. Wealth? A royal treasure! All his. No more trouble than killing a couple of rabbits. And Timmy Goff had got what was coming to him, trying to pull gun stuff on a pal! Tug stood up, blinking in the level sun rays. He wanted a drink. Rum. That was the stuff to put heart into a man. Timmy had wanted water. Look where Timmy was now. Tug could see where he had last gone down. The boat floated just beyond the spot, passing swiftly to the westward.

Tug stooped to play with his riches. Suddenly he straightened up, his eyes fastened upon the boat with a new, awful knowledge in them. His hands full of treasure, he ran to where the boat had touched shore. Before he knew it he was thigh deep in the water, and the current pulled at him so that his feet seemed to be made of cork and would not hold him fast to the rock. He lost one handful of gems before he realized that he must fight like a madman to hold the shore. And the boat glided away. The schooner lay half a mile away; quiet and sleepy.

"Th' little sucker!" he panted. Why could Timmy not have made the boat fast before trying to jump ashore?

BUT realization was coming swiftly to Tug. He ran, still holding an open handful of jewels, to the other side of the cay. There was nothing to hinder his progress. Not a bush. Not a thing but sand. At the far side he picked up a bit of old, old driftwood. He chattered with glee. The other handful of gems went into his pants pocket with a careless thrust. Tug could not swim. He knew it. The piece of wood would float him out to the schooner.

The wood powdered in his hands. Stooping in swift fear, the gems in his pocket cut him. There was no more wood. Run as he might around the Cay, no floatable thing could be found. Back at the diggings he snatched the pick and shovel, smashing off the heads. In the calmest corner of the rocks he eagerly tried to float his weight on the handles. They were hardwood. They sank with little resistance.

When night drew on, Tug Irons crouched at the edge of the sand, like a runner on the mark, glaring with awful intensity at the piling water. No scrap of wood, in all that vast wilderness of water. Far, far away in the setting sun a very ghost of smoke mocked him for a monent, then merged into the velvety night.

Half a mile away the schooner rode serenely at her anchor. On the edge of the digging the open iron box lay flaunting its gems to a sky which presently revealed a million gems to mock their tawdry glitter. A jug of rum lay there, unheeded by a thief who thirsted: whose eyes were fixed upon the sea: who at last saw the tremendous humor of the legacy bequeathed to him by Timmy Goff in the freehold of Knucklebone Cay.

Alexander's Rag Time JAG

A Riotous Yarn of a Roisterous Rooster

By HUBERT LOOMIS SMITH

ALTHOUGH the outrageous upbringing of Alexander and his subsequent taking to the mistletoe habit were at the root of all the trouble between Bill Williams and Andy MacCan, it is possible that there would never have been any break between the old cronies if it had not been for Alexander's red whiskers. For in Andy's eyes those red whiskers were the last straw.

"I ain't agoin' to stand fer it!" he shrilly protested to Bill more than once. "I ain't agoin' to stand fer him wipin' them whiskers all over the works."

But since Alexander, his whiskers, his mistletoe habit and his outrageous upbringing were all so inextricably interrelated, it would, perhaps, be simpler to state that there would have been no quarrel if there had been no Alexander. And there would have been no Alexander, at all, if Bill Williams had followed his usual custom and bought strictly fresh cold-storage eggs at the Arizona Cash Grocery & Meat Market in town.

It must be emphasized, however, that Bill on this fateful occasion did not buy his eggs in town. And from this seemingly trivial circumstance flowed a tidal wave of events which not only came close to overwhelming both himself and Andy MacCan, but which even involved the authorities of the United States of America.

All day Bill had been burrowing through the screw-bean jungle down river in search of a stray heifer. It was too late to ride into Yuma, so being more than usually hungry, he drew rein on the way home at the bars in front of the stick-and-mud shack of Juan Hernandez. Strains of "canned" music came from within and a rebosa-draped Mexican woman stood in the doorway.

"Hey, *señora!*" he called. "Got a dozen eggs you'll sell me?"

"Sure," she answered, shifting the half-naked child astride of her hip and throwing away the butt of her corn-shuck cigarette, "Got plentee. Juancito, he fin' heem one grande, beeg nes' een tha brush. Two, t'ree dozena egg een tha nes'."

"You sure they're fresh?" Bill inquired dubiously.

"Ah *si, si señor,*" reassured Mrs. Hernandez. "Gotta be fres'—Juancito, he onlee fin' heem tha nes' jes' today." And she

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dove into the doorway through a throng of small, brown Hernandezes. A loud whack, a squeal and a small hog emerged almost simultaneously from the house and shortly the *señora* reappeared with the eggs in a twist of soiled paper.

"That peeg *muy malo*," she explained. "All day he escratch hees ol' back on tha new fonografo."

Half an hour later Bill was bending over the greasy stove in his cabin near the Colorado. The sun was sinking in a blaze of glory behind Pilot Knob, tinting the desert buttes with rainbow hues of unearthly beauty. Through the open door floated the spicy fragrance of arrow-weed and the rose-like scent of mesquite chips. Turtle-doves sped by on whistling wings to their roost in the cottonwoods by the river and quail called from the thickets. Peace, infinite peace, brooded over the valley of the Colorado. But no peace brooded over Bill Williams.

"Dern!" he muttered as he strode hastily to the door and flung some offending white object far out into the arrow-weed—at least it sounded like "Dern." Bill opened the window and cracked another egg on the edge of the frying pan with tender care. He smelled it gingerly and his face relaxed. Deftly breaking it in two, he dropped the contents into the smoking utensil. A cheerful sputter arose and an appetizing odor filled the room. But Bill felt neither cheered nor appetized as he glared at the frying egg. A network of fine red lines radiated from where the yolk should have been and from out of that nucleus a fishy-looking eye gazed reproachfully up at Bill. As the egg sizzled and heaved in the hot grease, browning nicely around the edges, Bill thought he saw the eye wink back a tear and small angel wings take shape on either side.

To a biologist the sight would have held much of interest, but Bill's mind was not of the scientific order. Again he spoke—and this time "Dern" was quite audibly not the word he used. Striding to the door he removed pan and contents from the house with a decision and vigor that would have earned him laurels on any diamond. Then, one by one, he caught up the offending eggs and hurled them after the pan. But as he swung his hand back with the last egg poised on the brink of eternity, Bill felt a sharp jab against his finger and heard a faint "Peep, peep."

SOMEWHAT startled he examined the egg which was a very large, oddly-shaped one and extremely soiled. Again he felt the prick of a sharp object against his finger. Turning the egg over he saw a small hole with a small beak protruding therefrom and hammering vigorously at its brittle prison. Feeling much like a man caught in the act of murder, Bill carefully laid the egg on the table and watched the sharp beak gradually ring its way around the egg's equator. Suddenly there was a heave and the two hemispheres flew asunder; a small head, glistening like a hair-oil advertisement, popped out of the Arctic Circle; two pink feet kicked free from the Tropic of Capricorn and, lo, the chick was hatched. Teetering on its uncertain legs and with a bit of shell still clinging in the neighborhood of Cape Horn, it looked about with wabbly interest.

Bill poked a horny finger at the morsel of moist down and received a sharp peck in retaliation. "The game little cuss!" he grinned, and, somehow, looking down at the foundling he felt a strange, faint tug at his heart strings.

Bill's bandana coiled in an old Stetson made an excellent nest and in it he deposited the struggling orphan, together with a cracker, a lump of sugar and a bit of jerky.

"Reg'lar little he-cuss," ruminated Bill as later on he ate his lonely supper of crackers and cheese. "Reckon I'll call him Alexander, because he's a fighter and he's goin' to be great."

Probably nine hundred and ninety-nine chicks out of a thousand under the circumstances would have died, but in spite of his unconventional surroundings Alexander throve and, more and more as the days went by, displayed an amazing precocity.

"Alexander's a reg'lar fella, he is," boasted Bill a week later to his nearest neighbor and crony, Andy MacCan. "The little son-of-a-gun chaws tobacca already and spits accurate, he does. He'll be rollin' his own pertty soon, the little cuss."

"That jest shows what a ingnorambus you are," responded Andy with withering scorn. "It ain't good fer no infant to chaw tobacca. You ain't never heerd of no infant cow, or infant horse, or infant Mexican, or any other infant animal what chawed tobacca and growed up to amount to shucks, have ya? Most folks got too much sense to let 'em have it. Young chickens don't need no tobacca; they gotta suck milk jest like any other kind of infant."

"I don't want Alexander to grow up like no ol' cow, or no Mexican, neither," protested Bill. "He's goin' to toughen up and have some guts to him, that little he-cuss is."

Andy's opinion, nevertheless, worried Alexander's foster parent more than he was willing to admit. After prolonged mental debate he decided to compromise. Thereafter, a tin lid of condensed milk always sat in the corner along with the crackers and jerky; but beside it reposed a generous chunk of Bill's dark, pocket-polished plug and at this Alexander pecked from time to time. In line, also, with the toughening process, Bill kept him well supplied with bits of Mexican chilli pepper in its ripest, reddest, most fiery stage. This blistering dainty seemed especially to Alexander's taste, indeed, he showed from his birth a predilection for all things pungent of flavor or red of color. Had Bill but known what this predilection would lead to, many things which followed might never have happened, but no soul save Andy MacCan ever warned him that Alexander's upbringing was not all that a chicken's should be and Andy's dire prophecies were too common to be heeded.

Two bits of life's flotsam, Bill Williams and Andy MacCan had each drifted into the Yuma Valley years before in search of a milder climate and of some crevice to shelter them from the harsh strife of a changing West. Bill had come from the cow country of eastern Arizona, while Andy hailed from Utah. Brought up alike in sparsely settled districts, it was natural that on arriving in the Yuma country each should choose to avoid the cultivated portion of the valley where, even had they possessed the capital to acquire fields of cotton and alfalfa, neither of the old men would have felt at home. But for many miles between the levee and the river stretches a narrow no-man's-land—a tangle of mesquite and thorny screw-bean, piebald with brakes of eight-foot arrow-weed and brindled with belts of willow and white-trunked cottonwood. Here in surroundings reminiscent of their younger days the refugees found asylum, squatting not far apart on lands belonging to the Reclamation Service. Shielded from the world in front by the woodland tangle, their haven was protected in the rear by the purple-brown flood of the Colorado, where of an evening salmon leaped, and swallows, all unmindful of passport or customs invoice, skimmed to and fro between the shores of the U. S. A. and the willow-fringed banks of Mexico across the water.

Bill eked out a modest living from a few head of cattle ranging the brushlands, while Andy managed on his meager savings aided by the income from a few dozen hives of bees—but poor as both were, who shall say their lines were not laid in pleasant places? Their shacks were half a mile apart around the bends of the old levee road, but scarcely four hundred yards by the footpath through the riverside thickets of "batamote" and cane. Alike in circumstances and without near relatives, the two lonely old men were fast if somewhat contentious friends and the whitish dust of the shortcut was pulverized daily by the boots of the one or the brogans of the other.

LIVING alone in his disordered cabin without chick, child, or dog, Bill's heart warmed to the plucky little waif he had adopted more and more as the days went by. Nothing that Bill owned was too good for Alexander. At meal time Alexander promenaded Bill's bare, littered table, gobbling indiscriminately out of the bean pot, the frying pan, or Bill's plate and washing his food down with draughts from Bill's tin coffee cup. By day he accompanied Bill on his chores about the corral, or perched on his shoulder on long rides through the country. Scorning the shelter of the old Stetson after a few weeks, he roosted by night beside Bill's saddle on a sawhorse near Bill's bunk.

Whether it was the milk, the jerky, the chilli pepper, or the tobacco that made Alexander grow so fast, or just plain heredity, will never be known. Unusually large when hatched, at six months his size was monstrous. And a stranger looking rooster never drew breath. Large as his body was, his legs were of such disproportionate length and thickness that Andy insisted he looked like a crane with the gout. His color was mostly a molasses-yellow with a big greenish-black patch around one eye. His beak was hooked like a parrot's and had a whimsical twist to one side. This deformity (due to his youthful mistake in filching a rasher of sizzling bacon off the stove) gave him a singularly tough expression, especially when crowing out of one side of his mouth as was his wont. Wattles of extraordinary length and hectic hue somehow put one in mind of an Assyrian monarch—if Assyrians' whiskers were ever red—but the most unusual of Alexander's personal peculiarities were the spur-like tufts of feathers adorning his heels. These six-inch appendages swept outward and upward in a fine, saber-like curve and when Alexander, like another wing-footed Mercury, swaggered abroad they lent him the most reckless, swashbuckling air imaginable.

Almost daily Bill carried his pet over to Andy's homestead and at every meeting he dilated afresh upon Alexander's growing sagacity. But from the beginning Andy conceived a distaste for Alexander. A testy, contrary old fellow at all times, Bill's fulsome praises made him tired. Besides, Andy's cabin was as neat as Bill's was disorderly. Clean as a pin, every article in it had its own place and Andy could not have slept a wink with a knife in the place of a spoon, or with his pans nested in the wrong order.

In such a household Alexander was a calamity. Spoiled beyond measure, nothing could check his impish forays and few were the things which that limb of Satan could not eat, scratch, step in, upset, dirty, knock down, or otherwise prejudice during the briefest of visits. Added to this, his manners would have shocked the denizens of any pigsty, his conceit was insufferable, he showed no reverence, no modesty, no respect and he feared neither man nor devil. Florid as to complexion, Alexander's face seemed forever suffused with blushes, but that that brazen being would blush under any circumstances whatsoever is something that no soul who knew him could have been made to believe. Alexander was handicapped by no inferiority complex and it was impossible to snub him. Constant association with humans had sharpened his wits to a gamin-like acuteness and his impudence knew no bounds. Never having laid eyes on another of his own kind, it probably never entered Alexander's head that he was not himself a human being—albeit of a superior and privileged order.

Because of Alexander, Bill's visits became hours of torture for Andy MacCan. But even the desolation which followed in their wake was easier to bear than the insults Alexander heaped upon him. Poor Andy could never so much as glare at his tormentor but that odious fowl would sidle offensively and mock him with chuckle; while after every act of piracy the freebooter, keeping just out of reach, would twist his neck and crow loud and long in the face of his victim. No wonder Andy's hatred soon burst the bounds of grim endurance.

"You jest gotta keep that half-breed buzzard off'n my table!" he yelled one day when Bill with Alexander had dropped in at meal time. "I ain't agoin' to stand fer no rooster what comes aswabblin' his ol' whiskers in my victuals."

"That shows how fault-findin' you're gettin' to be," replied his crony with some heat. "I reckon Alexander's whiskers are jest as clean as your ol' whiskers. Alexander washes his'n, frequent."

"Well, he needn't wash 'em in my coffee, dang him."

"That ain't no worse than you adanglin' your ol' fan-tail mustache in your coffee, is it?"

"Well, my mustache ain't red an' I don't go aflippin' it around like I owned the whole works, neither," shrilled Andy with rising wrath. "An' I don't crow lopsided in people's faces, do I? An' I don't strut around with thinga-ma-dings on my heels, do I? Anybody with sense'd know that danged rooster ain't no kind of a rooster to plunk down on a man's table."

TO THOSE, however, who did not have to suffer too close association with him, Alexander was very popular. Indeed, Bill Williams's rooster soon became famous throughout Yuma County. When Bill went to town Alexander rode with him, and, whether drinking gingerpop with Bill at a saloon, or parading a grocery counter with his throat so full of cheese and sardines that he could scarcely achieve a muffled crow, Alexander was always the center of an admiring crowd. From the Pot Holes in the north to Gadsden in the south stories of his impish exploits circulated through the valley and few were those who did not boast his speaking acquaintance.

But there was one person besides Andy MacCan who hated the sight of Bill Williams's rooster, and that was Red Mulroony, a member of the local prohibition enforcement squad. His job was to patrol the levee road to prevent the smuggling of liquor across from the Mexican side of the river. Mulroony was a burly, red-headed gentleman of forceful personality and lurid language whose former occupation of saloonkeeper especially fitted him in the eyes of an all-wise government for the onerous task of stamping out the liquor traffic. In spite of his past, however, Mulroony was an efficient officer and the extreme vivid coloring of his countenance, and especially of his beak-like nose, was unquestionably due to performance of duty in the blistering Arizona sun rather than to any less worthy cause. This nose of Mulroony's had been warped in some youthful fistic encounter and he had the habit of talking out of the side of his mouth. In short, there was more than a slight resemblance between the worthy prohibition agent and Bill's famous rooster and some wag, detecting the phenomenon, promptly lumped the two together as "the Mulroony twins."

This witticism found popular favor and reaching Mulroony's ears somehow got under his skin. Every day as he passed Bill's shack in his little red roadster, Mulroony would scowl at his feathered prototype, while Alexander, sensing his hostility, would sidle and chuckle in his most exasperating manner and crow his most insulting crow out of the extreme side of his wry mouth. Then would Red Mulroony curse under his breath.

"I'll wring that danged rooster's neck for him some day," he would mutter.

But Alexander, oblivious of the future, knew only that life was good and the world his oyster. When not riding or walking with Bill, he spent the lazy hours bathing luxuriously in the warm dust of the corral, or rambling about under the sprawling mesquite trees nearby. A bounteous crop of long, golden pods full of caked sugar made the mesquite groves a favorite haunt of Bill's cattle and Alexander soon learned that where cattle foregather, flies and bugs do, also. Delectable worms fell from the foliage above and fine, gamey-flavored hoppers tickled an appetite jaded with jerky, chilli pepper and milk. The mesquites were bunchy with great clusters of the species of mistletoe peculiar to them—clusters which filled the air with lemon fragrance and cast, among the lacey shadows of the mesquite boughs, deeper, cooler shades where Alexander could sprawl when weary. Then, too, the mistletoe dropped a steady drizzle of little whitish berries which made a palatable dessert for roosters who have dined well on jerky, chilli pepper and worms.

Now if Alexander had confined himself to the white berries of the mistletoe all would have been well and many things would never have happened that later on did come about. For the mistletoe berry in its white, freshly-fallen state is a perfectly innocent and healthful viand which may with propriety be included in the dietary of the most abstemious and respectable circles of chicken society. But, alas, the mistletoe berry is the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of the vegetable world. Under the hot Arizona sun it soon turns yellow and in smell and flavor takes on a cidery piquancy. In other words, fermentation sets in and by the time the fallen berry has turned yellow, the alcoholic content far exceeds the one-half of one per cent conceded by Mr. Volstead and its use by chickens would never, never be endorsed by the W. C. T. U. Even this would not be so serious, but from bad the mistletoe berry rapidly goes to worse. From an illegal yellow it passes to a felonious red! Then, indeed, is the mistletoe berry a snare and a pitfall for misguided roosters and its potency for evil beyond words to describe.

At first Alexander partook only of berries of untainted white. But one day in an idle moment he sampled a yellow berry and immediately, as it were, sat up and took notice. Here was something new under the sun; a fascinating flavor with a kick to it—vastly intriguing to a palate already demoralized by the twin vices of tobacco and chilli pepper. Then Alexander looked upon the berry when it was red and he was lost. Thereafter, none but the reddest berries ever passed his lips.

BUT why chronicle the progressive stages of Alexander's fall?—stages in degradation only too familiar to an alcohol-cursed world. From a casual tippler, who could take them or leave them alone, he shortly reached the condition where his beery breath, his watery eye and uncertain step all proclaimed him the slave of the vile red berry. As the vice grew upon him, Alexander's comb and wattles took on the mottled, purplish hue of the confirmed inebriate, his never-too-handsome countenance assumed a bloated, apoplectic appearance and the last vestige of refinement faded from his coarsened features. In the interest of temperance one should like to relate how black were Alexander's moods between sprees, how poignant his remorse. But the truth must be told. Alexander was happy, deliriously happy, from his thirsty awakening at break of day to the hilarious hour when he would flop unsteadily to his roost by the saddle near Bill's bunk. To him life was one long, ecstatic adventure and the patter of the falling berry the sweetest sound in all the world.

If a sober Alexander was a sore trial to fussy, old Andy MacCan, an Alexander debased by the Demon Rum was unspeakable.

"You jest gotta keep that danged rooster of yourn outa my turnips," he howled as Alexander staggered his destructive course through his garden. "There he goes agin aflippin' his ol' whiskers an' agobblin' down my veg'tibles like he owned the whole works."

"That jest shows how unreasonable you are," Bill retorted. "The pore ol' cuss's gotta have a snack of greens once in a while, ain't he? Roosters need greens and I reckon my rooster's got as good a right to eat greens as any other rooster."

"You think I planted them greens jest fer a ol' hyena with red whiskers to come along and chaw to pieces?"

"Well, if you're goin' to be so stingy mean about a few greens I won't let Alexander touch 'em no more."

"They ain't no man," shrilly protested Andy, "what'd stand fer a ol' carrion-crow with thinga-ma-dings on his heels comin' acrowin' in his face while he gobbled up his greens."

"Well, you *are* gettin' to be a cranky ol' cuss, you are. I'm tired of your pickin' on my rooster. First, you go to kickin' 'cause he grows whiskers, then you don't want him to eat no greens, an' now you don't want him to have no heels. It looks like pore Alexander can't do nothin' to please you. I reckon I won't bring my rooster here no more." With which dire threat Bill tucked his injured darling under his arm and strode home in high dudgeon.

But Alexander was not so easy to keep at home as Bill imagined. Being an old cattle man Bill scorned to plant a garden himself, but as he had pointed out roosters need greens, even roosters with an appetite for red berries. Indeed, when well illuminated with red ones Alexander always felt a particular craving for greens and, as he had traversed the footpath between the two homesteads from infancy, he saw no reason why he should not have greens. Also, there were sundry edibles on Andy's shelves that appealed to him and a window or door was usually open on account of the heat.

Andy spent most of his time among his bee hives far from the house and the fact that he might appear at any moment only added spice to Alexander's enjoyment. So every day, after tanking up on red ones, that molasses-colored fowl would turn his unsteady toes in the direction of Andy's premises, where he would arrive in a beastly state of intoxication, but still potent for mischief. From time to time Andy would sneak up cudgel in hand to find his persecutor enacting "Ten Nights in a Bar-Room" amongst his treasured possessions—and often fifteen or twenty. But Alexander was shrewd. From infancy he had divined that Andy's love for him was not as deep and true as it might be, so that ambuscades were unavailing. Always he kept just out of reach, even while in his cups he displayed a devilish skill in dodging missiles. And at each failure he would chortle with maudlin glee and from the side of his mouth pump out a jeering crow.

"I'll fix that danged ol' cross between a buzzard an' a mowin'-machine," decided Andy one day. "I'll teach him to come 'round here ajabbin' the air with them butcher-knife thinga-ma-dings like he owned the whole works. I'm agoin' to buy a dog." And a dog he bought that very day.

Tiger was a large dog and Andy chuckled as from his hiding place behind the honey tank he watched his enemy approach. So did Tiger. The encounter took place at the front door and it was brief. Thereafter, during Alexander's raids, Tiger entrenched himself under his master's bed. From this stronghold he hurled a devastating barrage of snarls and growls which the invader could scarcely answer with mocking chuckles so full was his throat of Andy's biscuit and bacon grease.

"My dog's proud, that's all," explained Andy with sour looks to Bill the next day as a tail-tucked Tiger hastened to his post of duty beneath the bed. "No dog what's proud's agoin' to fight with a low-down ol' bum of a rooster what's drunk all the time."

But secretly Andy was chagrined beyond measure. Long hours he pondered some way of revenge. It must be an artistic, a satisfying revenge; one that would restore prestige and self-respect to the House of MacCan.

"I'll buy a real fightin' rooster, that's what I'll do," he finally decided. "A rooster what can lick him with one hand tied behind his back."

Sober judgment, however, told Andy that roosters who could withstand the berserk charge of Alexander were rare as roosters with gold-filled teeth. Not for a thousand dollars would he risk another defeat.

"Trouble is," he ruminated, "that ol' buzzard's been spoiled till he ain't afeard of nothin' an' a sober, decent-raised rooster wouldn't stand no show with him. I gotta raise a rooster special fer the job, that's what I gotta do. I gotta raise him from a chick like Bill done."

All day long, Andy MacCan in his wobbly-wheeled buckboard drove from ranch to ranch in search of a chick of champion caliber. Anxiously he examined the most likely candidates, comparing their height, weight, reach and chest expansion. At last he found a week-old chick who more than met every specification. It was large and lively for its age; it had a bold eye, a chesty bearing and a muscular development which was all the heart could desire. When Andy poked it with a straw, it fought back with spirit. In triumph he bore the prodigy home.

"Natural born bruiser, he is," he gloated to himself. "He's got a fightin' chin on him an' a solar plexus. His name's John L. Sullivan an' in three months he'll scramble that ol' buzzard till he can't tell his whiskers from his thinga-ma-dings."

Hidden behind the wagon shed, Andy built a tiny house and run and here he spent furtive hours training the small white hope for the battle to come. Crackers, condensed milk, jerky and chilli peppers were John L. Sullivan's main diet, but a goodly square of plug tobacco was there for him to peck at, while beside it was always a generous heap of mistletoe berries of the reddest description.

THE day came, however, when Andy could find no mistletoe berries for the champion-to-be. The berry season was over and all day long a disconsolate Alexander wandered in vain search of red ones. But, though heartbroken, Alexander was a dead game sport, so daily at the sight of Red Mulroony passing by in his little red car, he would buck up and twisting his neck with the skill of long practice he would crowd all the insult he could muster into a wry-mouthed crow.

Mulroony was a busy man these days. Yuma had sprung a large, wet leak of first magnitude and Wright, the local chief of the prohibition forces, was at his wit's end to locate it. Morning, noon and night he urged his squad to greater efforts, so that at any hour of daylight or darkness one might see the little red car of Mulroony patrolling the levee road, or the red nose of its owner poking into every corner where a clue might lurk.

Enforced sobriety soon showed in Alexander's improved appearance, but though his eye was clear and his step firm, Alexander was not reconciled. His system cried loud for alcohol and ceaseless was his search for red ones, yellow ones, green ones—something, *anything* that would yield a kick. His days were an aching void and to fill them, more and more, he sought distraction in the stimulating atmosphere of Andy's premises. Day by day his depredations grew more outrageous, his methods more reckless. His special joy was to dash into the house while Andy was eating or cooking and to seize some dainty in the very face of the enemy.

Matters came to a head one day. Hopping from the rim of the bean pot as Andy bore down upon him, Alexander bogged down in a pan of lard, quickly flopped out and, skidding across the table, upset the syrup pitcher. Then having put the table between himself and his pursuer, he tarried to sample the contents of the sour-dough bucket whose aroma reminded him of red ones. But for once Andy forgot that he was a very careful, methodical man. Seizing the ax he hurled it with precision, smashing dishes, bean pot and sour-dough bucket and splashing their contents from one end of the room to the other. Somewhat spattered and more than half angry, Alexander flew out of the window (removing a pane of glass in his passage) and went home. Close behind him loped Mr. MacCan with the ax.

"I'm agoin' to kill that hyena right now!" he bellowed at Bill's threshold. "I'm agoin' to twist his danged neck till a corkscrew'll look like a straight-edge alongside of it."

"You kill that rooster," and Bill's voice had a clear, frosty ring new to Andy MacCan, "an' I'll blow your danged carcass so full of holes a fish-net'll be air tight compared to it." And one glance into the blue ice of Bill's eye told Andy that he meant just what he said.

And thus did the friendship of years come to an end.

The first thing next morning Bill sourly commenced work on a yard for Alexander, keeping his eye on that worthy the while to see that he did not again raid the house of his former crony. But as the morning wore on Bill's vigilance relaxed and suddenly he awoke to the realization that his pet was gone. Without delay he hastened down the familiar footpath leading to Andy's shack. He had scarcely walked fifty yards through the arrow-weed before he met Alexander homeward bound. But such an Alexander! An Alexander covered from head to feathered heels with mud and dust. An Alexander who progressed in zigzags, whose feet seemed determined to exchange places, and who skated on his neck or sat back on his tail at frequent intervals—an Alexander, in short, who found navigation extremely difficult. Seeing his master he luffed and, shipping a sea or two, came about on the starboard tack. Close hauled he lurched heavily to Bill's feet. That haven reached he promptly beached and careened for repairs.

Bill was perplexed. The last red one had long since shriveled away, yet here was Alexander drunk as never before! What mysterious, thrice-potent substitute had that erring fowl found now? Bill stooped and picked the sprawling bird up. Already he was dead to the world and snoring. His breath came in labored gusts and it reeked, yes, fairly reeked, of alcohol—not mistletoe berries but genuine, pre-Volstead, triple-distilled, knock-em-down-and-drag-em-out liquid dynamite. Somehow, somewhere Alexander had found ample consolation for the absence of red ones.

Then Bill saw red. "Andy done that! The danged ol' boot-legger!" he rasped. "A sneak what'll ply a rooster with rot-gut when he's tryin' hard to sober up and live decent is a low-down, sheep-herdin' skunk! That kind of a polecat is too dirty to honor by shootin', but I'll fix him."

Meantime, Andy was working with his bees and greatly puzzled. Or rather, he was trying to work with them, for it is difficult even for a trained bee man to work with one eye closed by a bee sting; with one ear, two lips and what felt like three noses rapidly swelling; and at the same time to slap one bee in his pants leg, remove another from his bald spot and dissuade a third well down the back of his neck.

Andy's bees were on the rampage. Those gentle, pure-strain, golden-banded Italians whom he had always bragged about as real pets, whom he was accustomed to handle without gloves or face net like so many suckling doves. Those same wellbred, model bees were acting up like a gang of hoodlum hornets whose nest has just been telescoped with a rock. Not only were they peeved with Andy, but a sort of Donnybrook Fair was raging at the entrance to every one of the fifty-six hives, while an angry buzzing within proclaimed a state of general Bolshevism.

Andy crushed the second bee to sting his right cheek and slapped at the bee nearest the end of his nose. His hand fell too late to save that beleaguered member, but it did bring to it an odor—a pleasing, pungent odor which Andy had never in his life associated with bees.

"I'll be danged if it ain't whisky!" he ejaculated. Then slowly a great light dawned upon him. "Bill done that! The danged ol' bootlegger!" he hissed. "Been pizenin' my bees with his dirty liquor. A blow-fly what'll do that kind of spite work is too low-down to drown in a gunny-sack, but I'll fix him."

THE following morning John Wright, the chief of the local prohibition enforcement squad, found two letters in his mail that made, as it were, a perfectly matched team. Both were scrawled in stubby pencil, both scorned all rules of orthography and syntax and both were couched in language which might well have scorched the soiled paper on which they were written. One letter was from Bill Williams and the other from Andy MacCan.

"So there's where the border's leaking!" the chief exulted. "And the gang has begun to quarrel over the swag. They always do, sooner or later."

Leaping into his big car he swung around the corner and, stepping on the gas, sped across the mesa and down the levee road. But presently there resounded a sharp "Bang!" followed by the familiar feeling of driving over some giant washboard. "A blowout!" exclaimed Wright in disgust and swore, not under his breath as they do in stories but audibly, quite audibly.

Hopping out he was just reaching for a wrench when around the curve who should drive in his little red car but his faithful lieutenant, Red Mulroony. In three shakes the chief had flagged him, ordered him to about-face and the two were speeding through the keen morning air toward the stretch of riverside woodland where Bill and Andy had so long neighbored in harmony.

"No one in sight here," said the chief as they passed Bill's shack. "Drive on to MacCan's; we'll search this afterwards."

Around the bend in the levee they whirled to a point where the road swung close to the River Colorado for a little way before again tunneling into the screw-bean jungle. There was an opening here and the ground sloped gently from the road to the muddy edge of the broad river beyond whose brown expanse slumbered the willow-clad Mexican shore. Across this opening ran the short-cut path so often trodden in former days by the two old cronies. And here a strange sight met the eyes of the speeding officers. The chief clutched Mulroony's arm and the flivver stopped with a jerk. For there in the oozy borderland between land and water were two blobs of mud tightly clasped and rolling over and over. The blobs seemed alive and struggling. Momentarily a dripping tentacle disengaged itself from one blob and fanned the air widly, or came down with a resounding whack on the other muddy mass. At times the strange objects reared half out of the ooze and took on almost the shape of human beings.

In truth they were human beings—very human.

"Pizen my bees, will ya!"

"Ply my rooster with rot-gut, will ya!" came alternately from the blobs as one or the other achieved the topmost position.

In a twinkling Wright and Mulroony were out of the car and had jerked the combatants to their feet.

"Aw, come out of it," bawled Mulroony whose never-too-sweet temper seemed especially edged this morning. "We gotcha with the goods. Where's that hooch?"

"Leggo o' me! I ain't got no hooch," protested Andy.

"I don't want no lip from yer!" bellowed the burly officer. "Come across now! Come across, or I'll bust yer face. Quick, now, where's that hooch?" and grasping the thin, old man more firmly by the collar he shook him until his teeth rattled.

"Cut out that rough stuff, Mulroony!" snapped Wright with a sudden rush of distaste for his subordinate. "You are an officer of the law, not a bar-room bouncer. Kindly remember that." Then turning to the two protesting old men, "But gentlemen this matter needs clearing up. You are both under arrest."

Glancing past his prisoners just then he saw an odd figure emerge from the arrow-weeds—a molasses-colored rooster of Shanghai build and wing-like heels, a rooster who staggered like a drunken man and chortled with Bacchanalian glee as he maneuvered his weaving legs. It was Alexander, Alexander with a peak load.

Seeing that he was observed, Alexander stiffened with alcoholic dignity and, just to show that he was sober, scratched an imaginary dunghill and swallowed an imaginary worm. Having thus vindicated himself to his entire satisfaction, he relaxed sufficiently to lean against a sapling and remark "Corrrhrrhrrhrrh" in a throaty basso apropos of nothing in particular.

Then Alexander, remembering some important business he had on hand, resumed his way. Straight—straight, that is, as the circumstances would permit—he steered for a willow tree on the river's brink not far from the watching group. At the foot of the willow Wright noted a tiny pool of amber liquid half filling an ancient cow track in the mud and around the pool buzzed many bees. Here Alexander hove-to and, dipping his beak full of the liquid, let it ripple down his gullet with manifest satisfaction. This draught was evidently an eye-opener only, for it was followed in rapid succession by a thirst-quencher, an appetizer and a stomachic. Then Alexander drank to the health of each of those present, had one or two for luck and another on the house. He was indulging in "just one more" when Wright stepped up.

The chief stooped to dip his finger in the amber puddle with its ring of sipping bees. "Whisky" he muttered.

In the mud all around were fresh human tracks—the tracks of a single man with large, square-toed shoes—while near by were the tracks of an automobile. Wright looked up and down the river's edge, then across to the dense thicket clothing the Mexican bank, but, save for the tracks and the tiny pool of liquor, there was no sign of human activity past or present. About to turn on his heel, his eye caught a gleam at the water's edge. It was a wire looped around a willow root and dipping into the river with scarcely an inch of its length showing above the mud. Tugging at it he brought a large steel drum to the surface of the turbid water. The drum was weighted to keep it from floating and from it the wire ran straight on out into the river—apparently across to the Mexican side. Kicking out the wooden bung with his heel, Wright found the receptacle empty, but from its interior came a strong whiff of whisky.

"YOU see how they work it," explained the chief to Mulroony as the latter moved up with his prisoners. "One man brings the stuff to the Mexican bank, then the fellow on this side pulls it across and empties the drum into some receptacle he brings along with him. See," pointing at the tiny pool, "there's where he spilled some in transferring it. Have you ever seen anybody hanging around here?"

"I seen these ol' ginks plenty of times," answered Mulroony still sulky from his chief's rebuke.

"Never anybody else?"

"Naw, nobody else don't come here. We got the goods on 'em, all right."

"It looks like it," agreed Wright with a shade of regret.

Both Bill and Andy opened their mouths to protest, but at the sound of Mulroony's gruff voice, Alexander, who had fallen into a doze, opened his eyes and emitted a maudlin chuckle. Mulroony's glance met the impudent gaze of the molasses-colored fowl and all the hatred of months surged into his red face. Whirling about he aimed a heartfelt kick at the rooster, tripped on the wire and fell flat in the mud.

Alexander opened his eyes again and hiccoughed. "Whash zhat?" his expression seemed to inquire, "Mishletoe berrish fallin'?" He looked about with interest. Close beside him was the face of his enemy and in the midst of that face the largest, ripest, reddest red one he had ever beheld. It was the red, red nose of Mulroony! Leaning forward he seized it firmly in his sharp beak. What matter if the red berry snorted and the enemy sputtered with rage—seizing things in the face of the enemy was Alexander's forte. Stoutly he held on to his prize, battling the foe with wing, talon and spur.

A moment later Mulroony flung his assailant far from him and, cursing, scrambled to his feet with the blood dripping from his scratched face. Sailing through the air from the impact of Mulroony's fist, Alexander flopped down on the back of the little red car. There he teetered wildly a moment, then flapping his wings, he twisted his neck and, opening his wry mouth wide, pumped up a victorious crow.

Beside himself with fury, Mulroony snatched his automatic from its holster and aimed, but just as he fired Bill struck the weapon down. Another instant and he had twisted it out of the officer's hand and had him covered.

But Chief Wright had no eyes for this scene, for he saw something of great scientific interest. Mulroony's bullet flying wild had drilled a neat hole in the tin body of his little red car and, behold, a miracle! Mulroony's car was bleeding! Bleeding a jet of amber blood with the strong smell of whisky.

RED MULROONY shook the dust of Yuma from his square-toed shoes soon after this and went East to settle down. His address is now Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and he is known there as Number 7362.

Alexander, also, has a number now. It is engraved on the miniature officer's badge presented last Christmas by Chief Wright. He wears it attached to his right leg just above the thinga-ma-ding, and Andy MacCan has taught him to flip his whiskers and crow whenever he needs a chew of tobacco. Nor did John L. Sullivan ever lick him, for John L. grew up to be a meek little bantam pullet. But even today, and in spite of every precaution, Andy's sour-dough bucket is never entirely safe, for as Andy often boasts to Bill:

"Our ol' rooster is sure some *cuss* of a rooster, he is."

An Authentic Story of the Navy

A *Present* *for* MISSY

By POLLOK GUILER

IN SPITE of the fact that the bilges of the Moro *vinta* reeked like a back street in Amoy, Neil Edwards, Seaman 1st, U. S. Navy, late of the gunboat *Abarenda*, breathlessly hugged the filth and fish-soaked bottom boards of the tippy, native craft like a mustard plaster.

But even a husky, young bluejacket cannot hold his breath indefinitely! Lungs almost at the bursting point, he popped his head from beneath the protective bamboo matting and gulped deep draughts of the refreshing night air. Then, as the precipitous steel sides of his floating home—which he had left surreptitiously a few minutes before via the anchor chain route—loomed menacingly, scarce an arm's length away from his unbelieving eyes, he ducked his head back under the mat again for all the world like a turtle at bay.

Breathing curses on the native boatman who had boldly taken the shortest cut to the landing, which course, unfortunately for Neil's peace of mind lay parallel to the entire length of the ship, he waited tense, expecting every moment to hear a challenge from the gunboat's deck, followed by the sharp crack of the sentry's rifle. But happily none came.

His heart pounding like an air-bound fire and bilge pump, Neil counted twenty paddle strokes, and when he could endure it no longer, again lifted his head for air. An unintelligible guttural from the Moro, which Neil interpreted to be reassuring, gave him courage to come out from hiding and venture a look about him. To his relief, he saw that they were well clear of the ship and the dangerous radiance of her lights, which seemed to blaze like brush heaps against the blackness of the tropical night.

The fact that a revolution was brewing among the Moros and that the *Abarenda* had been ordered to the Siasi group, not for leave and liberty but to impress the goaty Datu by a show of force, had very little weight with Neil. The bos'n that morning, in an eventful and highly unsatisfactory interview from which Neil had emerged a poor second—as is usually the case—had tried to make the whole thing clear to him when he had asked for liberty, but finally gave it up. Neil would not be convinced.

The mistaking of his bitter disappointment for stubborn surliness and insubordination had resulted in his spending the entire afternoon in the steaming double bottoms with but a chipping hammer for company, pecking the scale from the *Abarenda's* venerable plates. What secrets and longings Neil confided to the chipping hammer that afternoon will never be known, but there was a look of defiant purpose in the eyes of the dripping figure that emerged at supper time and stood aloof on the forecastle, staring moodily over the bows.

Neil realized that he was taking a terrible chance in defying authority, but his ambition to take home a pearl "that would knock their eyes out" far outweighed the possibility of a cruise ashore in the naval prison at Cavite. It is possible that there may have been a girl back in the Muskingum bottoms who was behind this blind obsession of his, or it may have been on account of a promise that he had made. Navy men frequently make promises, and with the best intentions in the world—at the time. Indeed, it may have been due to anyone of a dozen reasons. But whatever the cause, it has nothing to do with this story, and therefore doesn't matter. What does matter, is—he wanted a pearl. And now that he was at Siasi—one of the very few pearling centers at which ships of the Asiatic Fleet touch during their cruising about the station—he was going to realize his ambition or bust a ham-string.

Confident that no one on board had noted his getaway, Neil gave a final glance to the ship astern. Reassured, he climbed boldly from his hiding place in the bottom of the boat and perched up in the bow with his exultant gaze turned shoreward, where lay his heart's desire.

As the whispered rustling of the palm fronds now near at hand fell upon Neil's ears he felt a slight feeling of uneasiness creeping over him, not at all in keeping with the spirit of hot revolt experienced during the day, that had caused him to set out on this wild venture. Conscious of an unusual movement of the boat, he ducked quickly and turned suspicious eyes toward the native in the stern, expecting to hear the swish of a borong or kris. In that fraction of a second there flashed through his mind all the stories he had heard of the Moro's hope of heaven lying in their killing a Christian. Small wonder he had seemed so agreeable to taking him off the ship, Neil thought excitedly.

Deciding in his mind that the only thing to do was to get clear of this silent menace, he was about to jump overboard and attempt reaching the beach when the *vinta* glided gently alongside some bamboo piling and stopped dead in the water.

"Have arrive, Master!" the Moro broke the silence.

GULPING something in answer that was equally unintelligible to himself, Neil grasped the piling and stood on trembling limbs. His suspicions not entirely allayed, his eyes fell on the lights of the ship in the distance which meant safety. He hesitated a moment in indecision; then turning away he grasped the railing above and carefully pulled himself up to the rough, uneven floor of the rickety dock.

Feeling his way along over the corduroy planking, he advanced slowly on hands and knees toward the shore, stopping every few moments to watch and listen. Coming finally to the end of the dock and feeling again the solid ground beneath him, his fright of a few minutes before gave way to a feeling of confidence as his long-time ambition seemed now about to be fulfilled. Rising thankfully, he set out with bold strides toward the village, intending to make his purchase and start back as soon as possible.

Unconsciously, he gave a reassuring pat to the belt pocket in which the roll of bills for buying the pearl made a comfortable bulge. His confident stride could not have stopped more short had his hand touched a snake. The blood seemed to drain toward his heart and congeal there impeding its action and leaving him coldly faint. Horrified, he stood with mouth agape, his brain as incapable of action as though he had been struck over the head with a base-ball bat. But only for a moment.

Frantically he went through his pockets almost tearing the clothing off his back in his search. Even his shoes were investigated—and his hat. No possible hiding place was overlooked in the mad scramble, but save for some small change that he had slipped in his side pocket for paying the boatman, his entire savings were gone.

Nauseated, almost, from the bitterness of his disappointment, he sagged weakly to the ground. Minute after minute he sat there in helpless indecision, his hands automatically continuing the search through his ripped pockets.

"All over!" he sobbed finally, "all over!" staggering to his feet and, like a stricken thing, slowly groped his way back to the dock.

"The boat! the boat!" something seemed to shriek, awakening his benumbed brain to action, and putting springs under his feet.

"Fool!" he hissed, "of course!" bounding forward, his clattering feet on the split bamboo planking keeping pace with his rapidly beating heart as he hurried hopefully along without thought of danger. Pulling up short to prevent plunging over the end of the dock where he had landed, he looked quickly about, peering intently along its edges. The boat was not there.

Panting with excitement, he called timidly, thinking that the Moro was "lying off" or had paddled over among the scattering houses built over the water a short distance away. Receiving no answer, he called again, louder this time. In the deathly stillness that followed the echo there came but the lonely howl of a dog from far up in the hills where a small fire flickered.

Half frantic, he rushed ashore again to investigate the beach on both sides, thinking that he might be on the wrong dock. But his search was fruitless. Stumblingly he returned and took up his vigil.

With only the shimmering reflection of the stars on the water for company, he waited hopefully in the darkness cursing his stupidity for not making sure of his money. The lynx-eyed Moro had undoubtedly discovered the roll of bills in the bottom of the boat shortly after he had left, and even now, was spending it on a harem.

The thought made his blood boil. A surge of anger came over him that drove from his mind his intention of swimming back to the ship. He would look over the town and find his man! He had had but a glimpse of him as he embarked at the ship, but Neil felt sure in his mind that he could recognize him.

Thus decided, he set out for the village a second time, again with a firm purpose in his stubborn mind. Skirting the beach he came to a single street that led along the front of a row of bamboo huts built on piling over the water. Small bridges connected them to shore, and on the house end of the bridges, Neil could see shadowy forms grouped silently about tiny fires, watchfully waiting. He could not see their eyes, but as he passed he could feel them gimleting into his back. Unconsciously he quickened his pace until he was almost running.

Suddenly he heard voices ahead. Having been in a ghost-like atmosphere for so long, the sound was welcome, but now he advanced more warily, leaving the uncertain light of the street for the shadow of the great palms that lined its edge. Coming to a sharp turn in the road, he saw a broad beam of light shining from the open doorway of a hut that was much larger than its neighbors. It was from this house that the voices seemed to come.

Approaching silently as a trained woodsman, Neil gained the friendly shelter of a tree, just across the street from the hut. From this point of vantage, he could see what was going on inside, and at the same time have a view of those who came and went.

Scarcely had his eyes accommodated themselves to the light when a volley of pistol shots split the silence; the stabbing streaks of flame seemingly coming directly toward him. Temporarily blinded, he sprang to one side, colliding with the bole of the palm tree. Flattening himself scientifically against the rough bark he waited, trembling; expecting every moment to be rushed by a crazed fanatic.

LISTENING intently for stealthy footfalls, Neil finally gained courage to unplaster himself from the tree-trunk, and peer timidly from behind its friendly shelter into the doorway beyond. In the shadowy light of the kerosene lamp swinging from the rafters he could see groups of men squatting on the floor, apparently paying no attention to the salvo of shots that had caused him such needless alarm. While he watched in relieved surprise, a familiar figure dangling a large pistol in his hand, staggered into Neil's line of vision. Moving over to the counter, which also served as a bar, he rapped loudly with the pistol-butt and called in a voice unnecessarily harsh to the Chinese shop-keeper: "*Cerveza*, *pronto*, yu' yalla' scum! Beer!"

As he threw back his head to drink from the bottle which the Chinese had quickly brought him, Neil had a clear view of his handsome, swarthy face. Then he remembered. It was Captain Perez, skipper of a small and shady-reputationed inter-island trading steamer. The authorities knew that he was little better than a pirate, but he was too "slick" for them. Neil had learned this one night at Lurma—a wide open joint just outside Manila—when he heard the captain boasting in the bar that "he was Castilian to his finger tips."

"That bird's father was a coon sergeant in the old sixth cavalry an his mother a Filipina," Neil's companion had whispered to him, "an' everyone of them yalla-bellied swashbucklers with him knows it."

"Must be his ship I saw outside when I come ashore," Neil observed thoughtfully coming out from behind his tree. Then he chuckled, "Bet he's got manners enough not to brag about his Castile ancestry down here among these Moro boys!"

Neil was right; he never mentioned it south of Luzon.

Fairly at his ease, Neil quietly entered the room. Ignoring the glowering looks of the captain and his four or five companions whom he suspected were members of his crew, he gave them as wide a berth as possible, and asked for a bottle of beer. Not that he wanted the beer particularly, but the feel of the heavy quart bottle in his hand gave him a feeling of security, which thus far had been lacking. After paying his chit, he removed the cap from the bottle, and moved over to an inconspicuous place where he could observe everything that went on and at the same time be out of the way in case trouble should start. Neil was glad now that he was dungaree clad, and that he had failed to remove the grime of the double bottoms from his face and hands. In his present condition there was very little contrast between him and the dark-skinned Filipino seamen.

Under cover of drinking slowly from the bottle Neil quickly surveyed the room and its occupants. The men in skin tight trousers that reached to their bare feet, and naked to the waist, squatted in groups about the floor and on great bags of dried fish and rice. Calmly chewing betel nut, which they deftly prepared from silver and brass boxes containing the horrible mess of ingredients that go to make up a chew, they silently listened without change of expression to the captain and his men as they bartered with the shop-keeper.

Their primitively beautiful Malay women, likewise naked to their waists, stood or squatted in the background, their glowing eyes watching intently every move of the men. Seeing the glint of light on the graceful meat cleavers that every man carried, thrust carelessly in the gayly-colored sashes, Neil caught his breath sharply and turned his glance quickly away. Chancing to glance toward the bar, he saw the captain viciously sweep aside a small box which contained a number of gleaming white objects.

"Pearls!" he gasped, all interest.

So intent had he been in watching for his boatman, he had almost forgotten his original reason for coming ashore. As he leaned forward, watching eagerly, the captain uttered a disgusted "bah!" and grasping an empty bottle, brought it down heavily on the shaved head of one of the Orientals, shivering the glass to bits.

The yellow face took on a blank expression, and gently sank from sight behind the bar.

"*Perlas grandes!*" he roared, reaching for another bottle and brandishing it over the head of the remaining Oriental cowering against a shelf of woven mats in the corner, "Ketchie big pearls or by Santa Maria, I'll brain you!"

The skipper's men stepped back and glanced apprehensively at the silent, betel chewing Moros whose expressions changed not even by the flicker of an eyelash, while the terrified Chinese jabbered shrilly in his native Amoy-ese. Neil watched intently, gripping the neck of his bottle.

Suddenly as if in answer to the excited clamor, a door back of the bar swung open on noiseless hinges, and an aged Oriental stood framed in the doorway. Ghost-like he appeared in his long, white robes reaching to the floor until one saw his eyes. One glittering fiercely like an eagle's; the other, cataract covered, roving sightlessly in a background of mask-like face as devoid of expression as age-yellowed parchment stretched taut over a framework of bones. If there had been bristles on the back of Neil's neck they would have stood straight on end.

Noiselessly the old Chinaman seemed to float forward until only the width of the bar separated him and the skipper.

"What you wanchie?" he mouthed quietly through toothless gums, the single weird eye boring straight into the other's blinking ones.

The skipper repeated his previous demand, but in a far different tone of voice. There was a suspicion of awe in it.

With no apparent move, the Oriental's talon-like hands suddenly appeared before him, the long finger-nailed fingers grasping a small pasteboard box. Removing the cover there lay in a bed of fine, dried seaweed a glowing white object which to Neil's watchful gaze seemed as large as a pigeon's egg

THE skipper's eyes glowed covetously as he stretched out an eager hand, and Neil watching his every expression knew that at last he was seeing the real thing.

"*Cuanto vale?*" the skipper questioned, trying to appear casual, and when the old Chinaman failed to answer, repeated impatiently in pidgin English: "How much you wanchie this piece?"

"Sleven tlousan peso." Neil's straining ears caught the words.

"Seven thousand pesos!" he gasped, "Wh-why, that's thirty-five hundred dollars—gold."

"Seven thousand pesos?" the skipper yelped, "Why yu' old crook, you blong crazy man! Pearl no good—flat on one side—savvy?" indicating with a finger a possible imperfection.

"Sleven tlousan peso," the other repeated monotonously in tones of utter indifference, "You likee—allie light! No likee—maskee!"

The other Oriental who had been keeping well in the background with a wary eye on the skipper, now broke in eagerly.

"Slisty-fli hundled, Flenchman say can do yesterday," but the skipper turned away with a snarl. Saying something in an undertone to his men which was greeted with eager nods, he strode out of the room. The men hastily drained their bottles and followed after him whispering among themselves.

Neil watched their going with growing suspicion. He was in considerable doubt as to whether the old Chinaman, unprotected and practically alone among the unsympathetic Moros, had been wise in showing such a valuable object.

"Knows what he's about, though, I guess," he muttered inwardly, and dismissed the matter from his mind. He had troubles of his own to think about, but he would see that pearl first.

Rising, he idled over to where the old Oriental stood gazing out through the open door. The same thought that occurred to Neil may have been in his mind, but if so, one could not have detected it from his expression. The good eye still flashed fearlessly, while the other roved sightlessly from one side to the other.

"Can do look see?" Neil asked timidly, holding out his upturned palm.

With a movement so quick that Neil's eye did not detect it, the small box containing the pearl again appeared and was dropped lightly in his hand. Gazing longingly for a full minute at the pinkish white perfection, that now he could never but hope for in any size, Neil tore his eyes away from the pearl and glanced up. A chill of fear shot through him. Following the old Chinaman's fixed gaze, he turned quickly, expecting to see an assassin close behind him, but there was nothing beyond the open door but the intense blackness of the tropical night.

"Bad hombre?" he grunted in half question, nodding over his shoulder.

"Belly bad," the other agreed quickly, "he shoot slacled clocodile. Bad joss!"

Neil was startled. "Crocodile?" he echoed, stepping quickly to one side and glancing about him. Pet snakes were bad enough, but if there were a crocodile about—

"You hear now?" the old Chinese continued, pointing toward the floor and cocking his head to one side in an attitude of listening. The piercing eye softened, and the mask-like face seemed to light in senile ecstasy that gave Neil a creepy feeling.

"Crazy as a hatter!" Neil thought callously, until above the gentle lap, lap of the water against the pilings under the building, another sound like pigs wallowing in the slime, came to his ears.

"So that explains the pistol shots and the hand torch sticking from the skipper's pocket," he muttered, then as he pictured the huge slimy creatures lying in wait at the water's edge, his heart skipped a beat. "My God!" he breathed, "suppose I had tried to swim out to the ship?"

Giving a final longing look at the pearl, he passed it back to the waiting hand, and with a feeling of distaste, strode out into the night. He would take one more look for his boat, he decided, and if it was not at the dock, he would return and ask the Chinese to get one for him. Turning down the street he now groped his way. The houses looming faintly along the water-front now seemed deserted, and the tiny fires that had assisted him by their faint light were missing. Taking extreme care not to come too near the water's edge, and stopping every few minutes to listen and take his bearings, he slowly blundered along with his heart in his mouth, until the piece of bamboo with which he was sounding ahead like a blind man, rapped sharply on the planking that led to the dock.

Breathing thankfully, he advanced on cautious feet until about midway of the dock a gentle rapping, as of a boat lying alongside, fell on his ears. Panting with repressed excitement, he hurried along, calling in a low voice until the sound was beneath him. Stretching out at full length on the planking, he peered over. The reflection of the stars seemed to leer up at him. It was a ship's boat!

The absence of an armed boat-keeper made no impression whatever on his agitated mind. That there was a search party on shore looking for him, he was certain. By some means he must beat them back to the ship.

With little regard for sacred crocodiles or fanatical Moros, his only thought being to elude detection and capture by his own shipmates, he scrambled to his feet and dashed wildly down the rickety dock like seven devils were after him. Back on shore, he plunged off to the right of the direction he had previously taken, intending to make a circuit to the opposite end of the village and thus avoid the chance of meeting any of the men from the ship who might be returning to the boat.

"If I can make the old Chinaman's place, and get a boat—" he panted, as he fought his way through the thick brush, "I'll—"

What he intended to say ended in a smothered yell of fear. His last violent wrench from the tearing brush took him headlong into a pool of shallow water on the edge of a swamp. Expecting every moment to feel the vicious snap of great jaws on his legs, he wildly clawed his way out and crashed into the friendly brush. Resting a few moments to gather his wits about him and check his bearings, he started on again, but with greater care.

AFTER what seemed a long time, he came out onto the street, but not nearly so far along as he had intended. Fearing to trust himself in the brush again, he took off his shoes, and in stockinged feet, crept along under the palms, scarcely daring to breathe until he felt sure that he must be near his destination.

Leaning against a palm, he peered from side to side but the faint silhouettes of the straggling houses were not distinct enough for him to be certain. In any case, if that were the old Chinaman's shack before him, it was closed tightly, for no welcome flood of light came from the doorway.

Pondering what to do next, Neil was startled by a loud crash of breaking glass followed by sounds of scuffling and tumbling chairs and tables as though a half dozen drunks were wrecking a barroom. Then above the uproar, there came a wild scream that went through his being like a knife. Then silence.

Waiting breathless, Neil could feel the skin tightening on his legs, and little shivers chased up and down his spine. Suddenly before his distended eyes, the door of the house he had been watching burst open, and in the faint light that came from the interior three men dashed from the room and disappeared down the street in the direction of the dock.

Neil thought fast. His first impulse was to follow the example of the fleeing men and put as much distance between him and the trouble as he could, but he immediately vetoed this. Dressed as he was, he might readily be mistaken for one of the party!

Peering into the interior of the room, he could see shadowy forms locked together in close embrace, struggling in deadly quiet. Occasionally, he caught the flash of light on steel as an arm waved over the heads of the rapidly moving group. Only the deep sobbing of their breath came to him as they fought for the death grasp. Round and round they went miraculously keeping their feet, while Neil waited in sickening dread.

Suddenly as they came within the feeble light of the single candle that flickered on a shelf behind the bar, Neil caught a fleeting glimpse of the old Chinaman, his white robe flapping about him, straining to tear a hand from his throat as he tottered weakly from side to side. Another Oriental was hanging on desperately to a swinging arm that threshed him about as easily as though he had been a child.

"He's after the pearl!" the words burst from Neil like a sob. Dashing quickly inside the room, he seized a heavy bottle from the wreckage on the floor. Watching his opportunity, he stepped close and brought it down with a crash. Side-stepping like a flash, he rearmed himself and crouched, tense, ready to spring in again.

But that one blow was enough. Like an empty sack, the body slumped to the floor and sprawled out awkwardly, dragging the two struggling Orientals with it.

While the Chinese disentangled themselves and struggled to their feet, Neil stood rooted to the spot; his distended eyes fixed on the apparently lifeless body. He had struck harder than he had intended!

Casting an apprehensive eye toward the door, he knelt quickly and turned the man's face to the light. The cruel, handsome face covered with blood-flecked beer foam that showed grotesquely in the dim light could not be mistaken. It was Captain Perez.

In a panic, Neil snatched up the captain's wrist and listened intently as though to hear the beating of the other's heart above the thunder-like pounding of his own. After what seemed hours of agonized waiting, he felt a twitching of muscles; then the faint flicker of a rapidly reviving pulse.

Gasping a fervent, "Thank God!" his sagging knees supported him to the piled bags of dried fish where he thankfully sat down and dropped his face in his hands.

The strain was beginning to tell on Neil. In the past few hours he had experienced more agonizing fears than seldom fall to one man in a whole lifetime, and now, but by a hair, he might have been a murderer as well, and he wasn't out of the woods yet. Any moment the captain's men, who had scuttled away like curs at the first sign of danger, might come sneaking back and strike from the darkness. Or the Moros—or—his heart almost stopped beating, the Filipino Constabulary, attracted by the piercing scream, might come to investigate. The grim walls of Bilibid, shimmering in the blazing heat rose before his eyes.

"I wish to God I'd never seen a pearl," he moaned, "or heard of such a thing!"

Wearily dropping his hands to his knees, he slowly lifted his head. His drooping eyes came to focus with a snap; then widened almost to popping. The captain, who a few moments before had been lying stretched out helpless on the floor, had now half raised to a sitting position and was tugging desperately at his pistol butt.

Neil started up in alarm, but a maniacal cackle from the other side of the room, stopped him short. Turning like a flash, he saw the old Chinaman stooping grotesquely, fumbling along the floor as though looking for something. The other Oriental with narrowed, glittering eyes watching the captain's every move, crouched tense at the end of the bar. Suddenly he sprang, and before Neil could fathom his purpose, the captain groping desperately, disappeared through a gaping hole in the floor, and struck with a dull plop.

With a single move that Neil's bewildered stare scarcely noted, the floor planks were replaced, and the two Chinese shuffled calmly around the bar as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

NEIL listened in dread, scarcely breathing. No sound came to his intently listening ears save the gentle lap, lap of the receding tide against the piling beneath the building. Then a splashing; a commotion in the slime of the water's edge as of crawling monsters hurrying clumsily, followed by a piercing shriek that turned his back-bone to jelly. Then, horrible crunching sounds like wolves at a kill.

The Chinese glanced understandingly one to the other, and quietly shuffled about rearranging the bottles on the shelves.

Throwing his arm across his face as if to shut out the awful picture that flashed before his mind's eye, Neil staggered back and leaned against the wall.

After a moment he became conscious of the muffled pad, pad of running feet that were momentarily drawing closer and closer. The open door seemed the only means of egress, but he dare not risk that. Panicky, he scuttled over the top of the bags like a lizard, and when he could go no further, stretched out flat hoping to be invisible in the shadows of the corner of the room, and there he lay as motionless as the dried fish in the bags beneath him.

Scarcely had he settled himself in his smelly retreat when a Filipino Constabulary officer, followed by three men with Springfields held at a threatening angle, dashed into the room. The Chinese met his suspicious glare with bland unconcern as they continued with their work.

"For why all this row, eh?" he demanded officiously.

"Slailo' mans dlink too muchie—laise hellie! Then go, chop, chop!" the old Chinaman answered immediately with the indignant innocence of a child reporting an older brother to its parent.

A glance at the wrecked bar and at Neil's quiet form, stretched out on the tops of the bags, would have satisfied any normal person as to the truth of this statement, but the constabulary officer seemed dubious.

"What for was that scream?" He shot the question as though expecting to catch the other unaware. If such was his intention, he was badly fooled, for the old Chink never turned a hair. Glibly, as though repeating an oft used proverb, he mouthed indifferently:

"Mebby so slacled clocodile ketch 'em dog. No sabby!"

The officer cast a baffled look about the room, and after giving terse instructions to his men in a language that Neil could not understand, strode out. The old Chinaman, yawning sleepily, followed him to the door.

"They go that side," he called, pointing down the street in a direction opposite to that which they had actually taken.

Chuckling to himself, he slowly swung the door to, and dropped the heavy bar into place. Then his whole mood changed. Dropping his listless manner as one sheds a coat, he glided across the floor with surprising agility, and snatched up the candle. Motioning urgently for Neil, who by this time was sitting up in wonder, he spat a volley of sounds at the younger Oriental, which was answered by eager nods. Turning without a glance over his shoulder, he led the way out of the room.

Neil obeyed wonderingly, tightly clutching an empty bottle that he had picked up from the bar as he passed. Down a narrow passageway he followed the flickering light; through narrow doors and around corners; through storerooms piled high with ill smelling junk until he was hopelessly lost.

"Must be several houses built together," Neil thought, in a sweat of fear that he might go through the rickety floor as he stumbled along trying to keep pace, the bottle held ready in his hand. Finally they came to a small room, which as near as Neil could determine from their tortuous travels, must have been some distance from the room where the bar was.

Stooping down, his guide fumbled with a padlock on the floor, and threw back a small trap door barely large enough for a man to go through.

"Chop, Chop!" he whispered, pointing downward, motioning to Neil to make haste.

Neil's face went white beneath the grime, and he stepped back, moistening his lips. Glancing helplessly around, his gaze came back to the flashing eye that now glinted with contempt.

The Chinaman motioned again, insistently, this time, and Neil edged closer to the black square in the floor through which came the sound of water lapping against the piling. Peering into the blackness below, he could make out the dim outline of a ladder. His heart gave a bound.

"Boat? Can do?"

The Chinaman nodded in the affirmative, and turning listened intently toward the front of the building. Through the space that separated them from the street, sounds akin to pounding on the door filtered through.

Turning back to Neil he whispered excitedly: "Chop, chop! More better you hully!"

ASSURED now that there was no fear of treachery and that the old Chinaman was anxious to get him clear, Neil thrust one foot through the door and tested the ladder. Finding it solid, he climbed down, rung by rung, gingerly feeling his way. When his shoulders were level with the floor, the old Oriental with a look of paternal relief on his parchment-like face reached over and patted Neil fumbling on the back of the neck.

"Best chin-chin," he whispered, "you belly good joss! Plesent flo missy," and then the door descended over Neil's head, the bolt clicking ominously in his ears.

Neil had caught the whispered words of farewell half understandingly, but he did not pause to ponder them. Grasping the ladder with aching fingers, he felt about below him until his foot came in contact with a rope. Reaching down, he hauled in carefully until the boat bumped against the foot of the ladder. Safe in the boat, it was but the work of a moment to cast off and haul clear of the piling beneath the houses; then taking up the clumsy paddle, he headed joyfully toward the welcome group of lights that was the *Abarenda*.

"Anyway," he muttered, "the old fellow treated me white!" and with that, dismissed them from his mind, and again plied his paddle.

Taking a wide circuit, he approached the ship until he was in a sort of blind sector, which lay directly ahead of her as she swung at anchor. Crouching low in the stern of the boat, he used the paddle as a rudder, trusting to the tide assisted by an occasional stroke, to carry him down beneath the shelter of the overhanging bows.

Silent as a shadow Neil slowly drifted down the dark hulk that loomed high above him in the glow of her riding lights. Clutching the anchor chain, he carefully fended the boat off while he listened for the tramp of sentry or anchor watch. Peering upward as he waited, he gave a gasp of relief. There at the davit heads hung the dingey which he thought he had seen at the dock on shore.

"It must have been Captain Perez's boat," he breathed, glancing over his shoulder.

Casting off hurriedly, he pulled himself along the ship's side with his hands until he came to the sea-ladder. Poising himself on the gunwale, he sprang like a squirrel grasping the lower rung, and clawed his way to safety past the barnacled water-line. Holding tight the boat painter to prevent the boat from drifting down under the hawk-like eyes of the officer-of-the-deck aft, he climbed stealthily to the rail and peeped over.

Among the swaying shadows cast by the anchor light high on the jack staff, his sleeping shipmates in various stages of undress lay scattered over the deck breathing deeply. Here and there one twitched nervously or muttered in his dreams, but no sign of danger met Neil's darting eyes. The pounding of his heart subsided. He was home.

Casting his boat adrift—they might see it now for all he cared—he slipped through the life-lines and carefully picking his way among the outstretched arms and legs; he threw himself down on the deck amidships. But rest was not for him—not yet! Choking back a scream, he turned over and lay still—faint from an agonizing pain that shot through his spine. Those nearest him started up in sleepy, profane protesting; then settled down again. Neil was certain that a bullet had pierced him, but his frantic brain could not recall having heard the report. Apprehensively he waited, expecting every moment to see an over-zealous "leatherneck" come searching for his victim, but since no one appeared, he finally mustered up courage to explore his wound.

Gingerly he felt up his back for the gaping hole that he knew was there, but probe as he might, he could not find even so much as a scratch. Then he tried moving his legs. No paralysis there! And then he wiggled his shoulders, easily at first, then roughly.

"That beats hell!" he growled in half disappointed perplexity, sitting up and running his hands over the smooth planking where he had lain. No sticky wetness or sharp object rewarded his search.

Nonplussed, he again explored his spine. This time his groping fingers came in contact with a soft bulge that moved back and forth beneath his shirt. His heart gave a bound. Choking back a sob of joy, he gave his clenched fingers a yank that brought the back of his undershirt with them.

Quickly he disentangled the piece of cloth, his eyes glittering feverishly. Then—his fluttering heart flopped over and seemed to stop beating. His trembling hand held nothing but a small mass of sweat-soaked cardboard pulp and what appeared to be greasy, cotton waste.

Motionless, Neil sat, his unseeing eyes fixed on a far off place. His mind raced in futile circles—round and round like a drowning rat in a cage trap—striving to escape his lashing conscience. His trembling fingers of their own volition nervously pulled to bits the handful of trash that he still grasped, and dropped them on the deck between his feet.

Suddenly he stiffened. Closing his hand so tightly that the finger joint popped, he quickly placed the other over it. His mind dare not believe that his probing finger tips had told the truth!

He closed his eyes, pressing the lids close together like a child playing a game; then opened them again, and his hand at the same time.

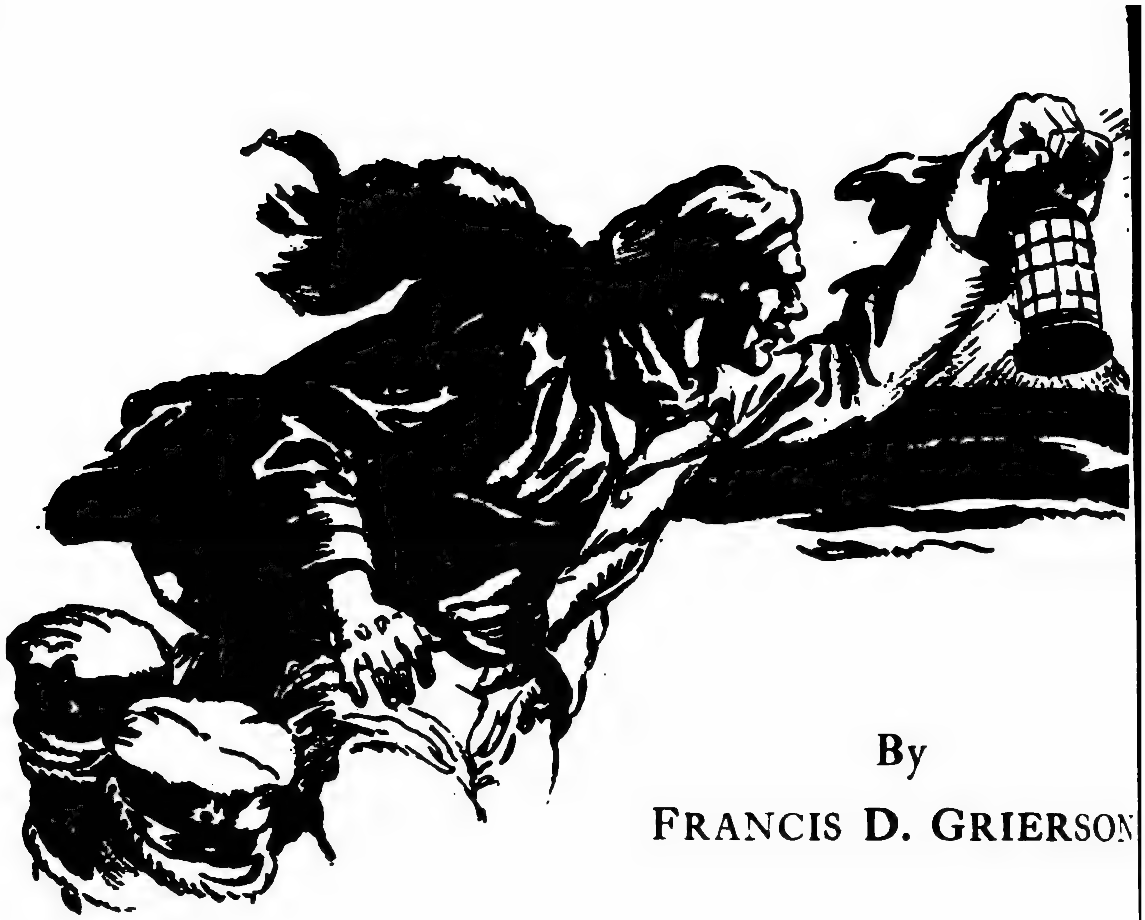
There, in his upturned palm, lay the old Chinaman's pearl—as pure and as beautiful as the moonbeams.

"Wh—what—h—how—!" Neil could only gasp.

Bewildered, he glanced wildly about him, as if to gain credence from the wall of blackness about him. Then he remembered the fumbling hand on the back of his neck; the old Chinaman's whispered: "a plesent flo missy—"

"A present for missy!" he cried, swallowing hard. And then not meaning to be profane or disrespectful, but to express in his own way his deepest reverence and love, he added devoutly:

"Why, God damn his old yella hide!"



By

FRANCIS D. GRIERSON

Preceding events briefly retold.

A smiling dead man is discovered in a London doorway by Roger Kent and Peter Felle who are walking home in the fog from a fashionable night club. They report to a near by police station where they run into Detective-Inspector Sims, and Professor Wells, the latter affectionately called "Uncle" by Kent. They find that Wells, a toxicology specialist, has for many years unofficially aided Scotland Yard and is a particular friend of Inspector Sims.

Sims is very much interested in the body they have found because of the smile on the face which is identical with the expression he has seen on numerous other bodies during the last few years. The coroner's report on these cases had always been "death due to heart failure." Both Sims and Wells believe these deaths are not from natural causes, they intend to investigate this case thoroughly and ask Kent and Felle to aid them. Both agree and Kent remembers that just previous to finding the body an apparently terrified girl brushed by them in the fog.

The next morning Kent starts out on a book collecting tour, a favorite occupation with him, but chooses the section of London in which they found the dead man. He really hopes to again see the girl who passed him in the fog. In his ramblings he goes into a strange bookshop, that of Gregory Marle. Here he sees Marle, Foster, his assistant—and to his great surprise the girl he has been looking for—she is Miss Fayne, Marle's ward.

He goes at once to Sims with this information though he does so reluctantly as he is much taken with Miss Fayne's appearance. At Sims' office he also finds Professor Wells and learns Marle is expected to call shortly to tell something about the dead man and possibly about his death.

Marle appears, first having identified the body at the morgue as that of Señor Garcia, a customer of his. Marle also states that he is afraid young Foster has unintentionally caused his death by attacking him the previous evening, in defense of Miss Fayne, on whom Garcia forced his attentions. Sims says that is impossible as Foster's encounter with Garcia was witnessed, following which each went his way. Also Foster spent the remainder of the evening at a Y. M. C. A. boxing bout where he was seen by many. Marle gave his information about Foster with apparent reluctance telling what he knew only because he deemed it his duty. He seemed deeply agitated and dropped his stick which the professor retrieved for him.

Wells takes the things found on Garcia's body home with him to look them over. He tells Sims that he has found a small puncture in Garcia's neck which escaped the police surgeon's notice. Both feel sure Garcia died from effect of some deadly poison used in a minute quantity.

That evening when Sims calls at the professor's house Wells surprises him by showing a message received by Garcia written in a cross-word puzzle cipher which reads: *Last warning—if pearls are not returned today you die.*

Professor Wells worked this message out from a cross-word puzzle found in Garcia's wallet. This puzzle was done in pen and ink and headed *For the Gazette*. It was apparently intended to be submitted to that paper for publication. It seemed so obviously of no importance that Sims had given it no attention. The professor finding it among the exhibits and being quite a puzzle fan tried to solve it. After working some time on it without being able to cross a single word, he became suspicious

Concluding

The Smiling Death

that it was not a legitimate puzzle but some sort of cipher.

The professor further informs Sims that when he picked up Marle's ebony stick the day before it was extremely light considering the size and material. He believes that Garcia was shot with a poisoned dart from an air gun; and that Marle's stick is the air gun. Sims agrees that the suspicion seems reasonable but that motive and evidence must be secured.

Marle calls on Professor Wells and threatens to kill him if he further investigates the Garcia case or himself, Marle the bookseller. Marle admits being responsible for Garcia's death, but laughingly points out that Wells can prove nothing. He also states that Pamela Fayne has nothing whatever to do with his activity outside of the bookshop.

Sims is called in by a jeweler, Mr. Baumberg, to help recover some stolen pearls. From Mr. Baumberg's story it is evident that Garcia stole these pearls and that they are the ones referred to in the cross-word puzzle cipher.

Wells frustrates Marle's first two attempts to kill him but almost succumbs to the third, a sandbag, while returning home late one evening. He is left for dead but thanks to a stiff opera hat survives. He is laid up indefinitely in a hospital and later transferred to his own house, with nurses and Scotland Yard men to attend him.

Sims realizes these attacks were made by Marle but has no evidence that will hold in court. He finally decides to send Marle a letter purporting to be from Garcia in the cross-word puzzle code, stating that the pearls will be found in the *Claribel Restaurant*, which place was previously Garcia's office. He has the code letter forged and arranges with Claribel Dene, whose father Marle had wronged, to take the letter to Marle in person stating she found it while cleaning up the place. Thus making it appear to Marle that Garcia had written it and had either mislaid it, or changed his mind, just prior to his death. Sims feels confident this message will bring some action from Marle that will enable the police to secure sufficient evidence to arrest him.

CHAPTER XX

IN HIS Soho room Mr. Marle unlocked his cupboards and went quickly through their contents. He lighted the fire laid ready in the grate, and threw into it certain documents he took from a despatch-box, watching them until they were consumed to ashes. Other papers he placed in a large pocket made in the inside of his waistcoat.

Then he sat down, refreshed himself with a pinch of snuff, and waited with characteristic patience until a peculiar knock sounded gently on the door.

Rising, he opened the door, and Hooky Morgan slid into the room in his furtive fashion, casting a rapid glance about him as he removed his hat.

"Sit down," said Mr. Marle, indicating a chair.

Hooky sat, rubbing his hands in

propitiation, for he recognised Mr. Marle's tone, and foresaw trouble for somebody.

"You sent for Smith?" asked the bookseller.

"At once," replied the other. "He ought to be here any minute now."

Mr. Marle nodded, and a silent pause followed, in which Hooky nervously crossed and uncrossed his legs and tried to watch his chief's face without appearing to do so.

At last a heavy tread sounded on the stair, and Red Joe knocked. Hooky admitted him, and Mr. Marle pointed to a seat.

"Now, listen," he said curtly, and both men noted the cold determination of his tone. "You know that I would not have allowed you to come to this place unless the matter were urgent. It is urgent. I have news of the pearls."

"That's excellent, sir," began Hooky fawningly, but the bookseller glared at him, and he subsided into silence.

"I say I have news of the pearls, but I am not yet certain of the value of the news: that is what we have to test. But before I speak of that, there are one or two other points. The boat is ready, I suppose?"

"The—the boat?" stammered Hooky, his unhealthy face growing paler.

"Yes, the boat," said Mr. Marle, with cold emphasis. "That is your business, isn't it?"

"Oh yes, sir, certainly. It's quite in order. Ready to start at any moment," Hooky assured him hastily.

"Good. And the city office—the fire arrangements are all right?"

"All in order, Mr. Marle."

"Damn you!" cried the bookseller with sudden violence. "Keep that name off your lips, will you?"

"I'm sorry, sir. I—I forgot," Hooky muttered.

"I don't allow my people to forget—until it is time for them to forget everything," said Mr. Marle, with a quiet significance that alarmed the other more than his previous anger.

Mr. Marle took out his snuffbox, tapped it, and took a pinch.

"Excuse me, chief, but—but have things gone wrong?" faltered Hooky.

Mr. Marle eyed him as one looks at a toad on the path.

"Afraid, are you?" he sneered.

"Oh no, sir," Hooky assured him. "I've complete faith in you always, chief."

"Just as well for you," said the bookseller, with cool contempt.

"Enough talk—" he was going on, when Red Joe cut in unexpectedly.

"Arstin' yer pardon, guv'nor," he said, "if the game's up, we ought to know it."

Mr. Marle looked at him.

"Are you drunk?" he demanded crisply.

"No, I ain't drunk," Red answered with a certain doggedness. "I'm arstin' you a plain question, and it's my opinion as you ought to treat us square."

Mr. Marle leaned forward and fixed his eyes on the man who dared to question him.

"When I want your opinion, Smith," he said, "I'll ask for it, until then, be silent."

Red Joe said nothing, but he met his chief's gaze with a sullen firmness that did not escape the latter's observation. In a flash Mr. Marle modified his original plans.

"You are a couple of fools," he said, smiling grimly. "Because I ask you if everything is in readiness for a journey I may have to make, you jump to the conclusion that my plans have miscarried. You ought to know that my plans never miscarry. See that you do your part, and leave the rest to me. Smith, your job is easy. I want you to keep an eye on a young fellow, a friend of Professor Wells. He may be of no importance at all to us, but I want to make sure. Find out all you can about him, and let me know. His name is Kent."

"Kent?" Red repeated.

"Yes, Captain Roger Kent. His address and a few particulars about him are on this paper. You can go now."

"But—" Red began, when Mr. Marle stopped him with a furious gesture.

"I've had enough of your talk," he cried. "Get out!" and he pointed to the door.

Red Joe got to his feet and stood looking at the bookseller for a moment with a strange expression on his face. Then he left the room, closing the door behind him, and they heard his slow steps descending the stairs.

MR. MARLE turned impatiently to the one-armed man.

"Has Smith been drinking again?" he asked.

"I'm afraid it looks like it, sir," Hooky answered.

Mr. Marle shook his head, dissatisfied.

"Smith has been growing difficult, lately," he said thoughtfully. "I am afraid it may become necessary to deal with him if this goes on. But never mind that now." He looked at his watch. "I want you to go to that restaurant which Garcia took for an office—you know the place?"

"The *Claribel?* Yes, sir."

"That is the place," and he told Hooky of the message he had received in which the hiding place of the pearls was stated.

"But how am I to get in?" Hooky demurred. "I've brought no tools."

Mr. Marle went to one of the cupboards and took a key from a shelf.

"When I sent Smith to look round the place, disguised as a detective," he said, "I told him to keep a lookout for the keys. They were hanging on a hook in the kitchen, as one might expect in a place run by women. Smith made an excuse to take them down, and took an imprint of the door key on a piece of wax he held in the palm of his hand. I had this key made from the pattern in case we might want it."

"You think of everything, chief," said Hooky, in open admiration.

Mr. Marle smiled a little grimly.

"I believe that oaf at Scotland Yard thought I really sent Smith to the shop in the hope of finding the pearls," he remarked.

"Smith thought so himself," Hooky declared.

"And you, too, I suppose?"

"Well—" Hooky hedged.

"You fool," Mr. Marle interrupted. "How on earth could Smith find the pearls there with half a dozen people looking on? Do you think Garcia left them on the mantelpiece?"

"Then why—?"

"Why did I want the key? Because I intended to take a look at the place myself, presently. Not that I was at all certain Garcia had really hidden the pearls there—in fact, I thought it most unlikely. But I intended to sound the place myself to make sure, without all the fuss and bother of a burglary."

"Red Joe doesn't miss much," Hooky observed tentatively.

"That is so. He is no fool, to give him his due. But Smith would look at all the places in which Garcia ought to have hidden the pearls, instead of the places he ought not to have hidden them in. Do you follow that?"

"Not quite, I'm afraid, sir," Hooky admitted.

"Have you ever read Edgar Allan Poe's story of *The Purloined Letter?*" asked the bookseller.

Hooky shook his head.

"That is a pity," Mr. Marle went on. "I have often told you that a knowledge of books is as useful to the man who breaks the laws as it is to the man who makes them. In this case the point is that the stolen document was not hidden, but was left lying where everybody could see it."

"Rather a dangerous plan, I should say."

"It deceived a number of quite efficient policemen, all the same," said the bookseller dryly. "But you'd better be getting along. It is quite simple. You have only to see that there is nobody in the street, open the door, and walk in. Two minutes will tell you whether the pearls are there or not. In any case, come straight back here as soon as you can. Of course, you will not take a taxicab."

Armed with the key, Hooky departed, and Mr. Marle, left to himself, paced up and down the room. Now that his lieutenant had gone he was able to give free rein to the anxieties that, despite himself, oppressed him.

For Mr. Marle was anxious.

THE more he thought of that crossword puzzle and its message, the more he doubted that Garcia had ever written it. Inspector Sims, as the bookseller had himself admitted to Professor Wells, was a man of ability. Although Mr. Marle had not credited him with the wit to devise such a trap, it was possible that he had underrated his subtlety. To lure him, Marle, into an unauthorised visit to the shop in the night hours, would furnish the detective with an excellent ground for his arrest, a consequent search of his premises and papers, and an investigation which at the best would be a nuisance, and at the worst might have unpleasant consequences.

If, on the other hand, the message were genuine, then the pearls were his for the taking, and he would be able to begin that winding up of his complicated affairs necessary to his retirement from criminal activities, which he had for some time past felt too great a strain on his strength. His gains had been great, but his expenses had not been small. But let him achieve this coup, and he would have ample means, and be free to devote his remaining years to those studies of the occult which had become more and more fascinating since his visit to India. And to that other great ambition of his life, the completion of a private library which would make his name famous throughout the world, and the foundations of which he had already laid by the patient and secret acquisition of volumes, purchased through agents who often did not know the real buyer, which were stored far from his London shop.

As to Hooky, Mr. Marle had no misgivings. If he walked into a police trap, he could at most receive a housebreaker's sentence. There was no fear that he would betray his chief, for to do so would be to acknowledge his own complicity in charges of a much more serious character.

As to the possibility of Hooky finding the pearls and making off with them, Mr. Marle was equally easy. In the first place, Hooky would be restrained by the knowledge that if he thus deceived his chief, the world would no longer be large enough to hold them both. In the second place, Hooky would not easily dispose of such booty except by sacrificing the greater part of its value.

But the bookseller's real anxiety was concerned with a much more important matter even than the recovery of the pearls: the result of Hooky's visit to the *Claribel* would, he was by this time convinced, reveal either directly or indirectly the extent to which Inspector Sims was to be feared.

He drew out his watch and studied it thoughtfully. It was a little difficult to estimate how long the one-armed man's mission would take him. He would walk from Soho, or he might cut into Charing Cross Road and jump on a Tottenham Court Road omnibus, though that would not really help him much. Well, give him half an hour to walk to the *Claribel*, including a slow preliminary stroll past the place to see that the coast was clear; then ten minutes—fifteen at the outside—to look for the pearls; another half hour to return: that made an hour and a quarter altogether.

Mr. Marle had recourse to the anæsthetic he carried wherever he went: a book. From his pocket he took his companion of the moment, Tolstoy's *Sevastopol*. There were times—especially times of great mental strain—when Mr. Marle felt that only Tolstoy (and Tolstoy in certain aspects) satisfied him. *War and Peace*, or particularly *Sevastopol*, could often capture his attention as no other form of distraction could, giving him that brief mental relaxation he needed to refresh his exhausted mind. He opened the book at random, at the point where the *aide-de-camp* Kalouguine "found four soldiers sitting on some rocks."

Despite the bookseller's preoccupation, the indescribable fascination of the Russian's stark, graphic phrases gripped him anew, and he read on, following the fortunes of the brothers Kolsetzoff in the great siege.

A KNOCK recalled him to realities with a start. He opened the door, which he had locked, and Hooky slipped into the room, his little eyes ashine with excitement.

"Well?" Mr. Marle demanded.

"I've got 'em, sir, I've got 'em!" cried the one-armed man.

"The pearls?"

"Yes. They were there right enough—where Garcia said."

He fumbled in an inner pocket with trembling fingers, and drew out an oblong packet, which he thrust into the bookseller's hands.

"It all went as smooth as possible," he went on rapidly, as Mr. Marle began to tear off the wrappings. "Not a soul in the street. I slipped in and got my knife out and had the board up in a minute, it was only a small section of board, where they'd been fitting a gaspipe or something. Then I grabbed the packet, slipped out again and came straight here."

He paused and uttered an exclamation of admiration as the bookseller held up a long rope of shimmering grey spheres.

"You have done well," Mr. Marle began, then stopped abruptly. Approaching the powerful electric reading lamp that stood on the table he examined the necklace closely, touched it here and there with his tongue—then, with a snarl, hurled it into the fireplace.

"The pearls!" cried Hooky in dismay,

and sprang forward. But his chief turned on him savagely.

"Pearls, you fool? They're false, every one of them. That's not Baumberg's necklace—it's a sham! A sham, I tell you—you could buy it for five shillings in a dozen shops all round us."

"Then it's a plant," muttered Hooky feebly.

"A plant? Of course it's a plant—a trap prepared for us by that damned policeman!"

He strode about the room, his hands clenched.

"Tell me," he said, stopping suddenly before his cringing assistant, "are you sure there was nobody in the street when you went into the shop?"

"I'm certain."

"Nor when you came out?"

"Nobody at all."

"Did you see a policeman anywhere near?"

"Not one."

"You wouldn't," said the bookseller grimly. "The man on the beat would have his orders to keep away. And I've no doubt that damned Sims and his gang were hidden snugly away watching you—perhaps they were in the shop itself."

"But if so, why didn't they get me?" demanded Hooky.

"Because they didn't want you," said his chief. "It was *me* they wanted—not you! They can get you any time they want, no doubt," he added contemptuously, and Hooky shivered.

"Can they?" he muttered, and his eyes sought the door.

Mr. Marle caught him by the shoulders and forced him to face him.

"None of that," he said sternly. "You'll do what I tell you, and do it quick, or you'll die a quicker death than the police will give you. Do you understand?"

Hooky nodded sullenly, succumbing to the other's ascendancy.

"Now, listen to me," Mr. Marle went on more quietly, "there's no need for all this panic. Inspector Sims has taken a trick, but I've a card to play yet that will surprise him. Stick to me and I'll save you: leave me, and you'll hang in a month. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, Mr. Marle," Hooky muttered. "I'll stick to you, sir," and into his eyes there crept the desperation of a cornered rat.

"Then attend to me," said the bookseller, and he rapidly sketched out a plan of campaign that made Hooky first stare in astonishment, and then twist his thin lips into an evil grin.

CHAPTER XXI

THE next day Roger Kent, who had lunched at home, was just finishing his coffee, when Ah Fong presented himself.

"One Mr. Smith comes to see you," he remarked.

"Show him in," directed Roger.

The Oriental presently ushered in the burly figure of Red Joe Smith.

As the man's eyes fell on Roger, he unconsciously stiffened to attention, as though parading before his company officer, and waited to be addressed.

"Who are you?" asked Roger curtly.

"Smith's my name, sir; Joe Smith."

"Well?"

"I'm arstin' the favor of speaking to you, sir."

Roger hesitated, uncertain whether to reveal his knowledge of Smith's identity or not.

"I 'aven't come to arst for money, sir," said Red with a hint of pride in his voice, mistaking the cause of Roger's hesitation.

"That's all right," Roger replied. "Sit down and tell me what you want."

Red Joe placed himself on a chair and his hat on the ground beside it, and looked straight at Roger.

"Captain Kent, sir," he said, "I'm going to arst you to cast your mind back to the time when you was a orficer in France. You've forgot about it, I expect—"

"No I haven't," said Roger, cutting him short. "I remember pulling your red head out of a mess, if that's what you mean."

"You remember, sir?" cried Red Joe in surprise. "I didn't think you'd 'ave recognised me."

"Oh yes," Roger answered coolly. "I recognised you the day you came to search the *Claribel* restaurant for stolen property."

"An' I never took notice of your being there—not that I'd 'ave known you, in any case," said Red thoughtfully. "After I come to in the hospital in France I tried to find out about you, sir, but you hadn't left no name, and it was only by a bit of luck I got your monicker—your name, sir—a long time after, through a mate. But I never come across you, though I tried often enough."

"What for?"

"A bloke don't get his life saved without wanting to say something about it to the man what saved him," said Red slowly.

"Oh, rot. There was nothing in that, Smith—"

"Begging your pardon, sir," Red interrupted, "I know all about that. But, takin' the liberty of saying so, a man like you don't want a lot of talk about that sort of a business, and I don't want to talk a lot about it, neither. Only to say I ain't forgot it, and I ain't likely to forget it, not as long as I live."

"Have a drink," said Roger hastily, to change the subject, but Red stayed his hand at the decanter.

"Water-wagon?" asked Roger, surprised.

Red grinned faintly.

"No, I ain't on the wagon," he admitted. "But after I've told you what I've got to tell you, you won't want to have no drink with me, Captain Kent."

ROGER looked at him keenly, but the man met his gaze with a grave firmness that was not without a certain dignity.

"Perhaps," said Roger thoughtfully, "I know what you are going to tell me. But you're going to have a drink, all the same."

He poured out a couple of whisky and sodas, handed one to the astonished Red Joe and lifted the other himself.

In silence both men drank; then Roger sat down and waited.

"It's like this 'ere, sir," said Red Joe, "I don't know what you know, but you seem to know more than I thought you did. That don't matter, anyhow, seeing as I've come to tell you things straight out. I'm a wrong 'un, Captain Kent, so the police would tell you if you arsted them, but I plays my game my own way, and I don't squeal if I've got to take my medicine. But I've never done the dirty on a pal—and if you'll excuse me takin' the liberty, a pal you've been to me, sir, though I didn't know it was you."

Roger nodded, recognising the ring of sincerity in the man's tone.

"Well, sir," Red Joe went on, "you know Mr. Marle, the bookseller, don't you?"

"Yes," said Roger, and Red grinned.

"You're right to be cautious," he said, "but you'll see presently whether you can trust me or not. Do you know what I'm supposed to be doing of at this very minute?"

Roger shook his head.

"I'm supposed to be watching you, sir—watching you and finding out everything I can about you, so as to tell it to that blasted old tyrant, Mr. Marle."

Roger laughed.

"You're certainly watching me closely enough," he said, "but I don't understand why you should come and tell me about it. Did Mr. Marle send you?"

"He did not. If he knew I was sitting talking to you, he'd finish me like you would a bloody cockroach."

There was no doubt of Red's earnestness. His hand shook as he took another drink.

"You're taking a bit of a risk, then," Roger suggested.

"Risk?"

Red placed his glass on the table and leaned forward.

"I'm a dead man if Mr. Marle finds out I've been to you," he said slowly. "And when you've told the police what I'm goin' to tell you, I'm for it—a lifer, I daresay, if I'm lucky enough not to swing!"

"But why on earth do you come here, then?" demanded Roger.

Red's heavy fist clenched, and a great vein swelled on his forehead.

"Why?" he repeated, with sudden heat. "Because I'm sick of his bloody tyrant's ways and his smooth, smilin' face. Because he's treated me like dirt. And because he's put me to spy on the man who did me the only good turn anybody's ever done me in my life. That's why, Captain Kent!"

Roger held up his hand.

"Stop a minute, and let me think," he said, and for a few moments the silence was only broken by Red Joe's heavy breathing.

"I don't want to take advantage of you, Smith," he said at last. "Before you tell me anything more, do you clearly realise that I shall go straight to the police with it?"

"'Course I do, sir; that's what I'm telling you for. I'll come with you, if you like. When you pulled me out of that bloody hell o' bullets I swore I'd pay you back some day. Now I've got the chance to do it. That's all there is to it."

"I may not be able to save you," said Roger. "It's a big risk—"

"Risk be damned!" cried Red violently. "I don't mean to give no sauce—I know what's due to a orficer, sir. But you didn't think about the risk when—"

"All right," Roger interrupted. "We'll—

He was interrupted by a tap at the door.

"What is it?" he called.

Ah Fong's face appeared.

"Very urgently the telephone," he said.

"Tell him I'm out, whoever it is," said Roger impatiently.

The Chinese flickered a glance at Red Joe.

"Very urgently the telephone," he repeated imperturbably.

Roger looked at the impassive yellow face. Then, with a word to Red Joe, he went out to the hall.

In a couple of minutes he was back again.

"That was Inspector Sims, of Scotland Yard," he said hurriedly. "He wants to see me at once—"

Red Joe sprang to his feet.

"Right, sir," he said promptly.

"You'll come?"

For answer, Red led the way to the door, and presently they were speeding to the Yard in Roger's car, which, as it happened, he had ordered to be brought round shortly before Red's arrival.

AT THE Yard they were quickly shown to the room of Inspector Sims. The detective was there, with Sergeant Andrews.

"Come in, Kent," said Sims, and Roger entered, followed by Red Joe.

"Ah, Smith," said the inspector coolly. "What are you doing here?"

"I brought him," said Roger quickly. "I mean, he came at his own wish."

"That's very kind of him," said the inspector dryly, but Red Joe had a sense of humor, too.

"I never thought as I'd pay you a visit here until I was fetched, guv'nor," he said with a grin.

In a few words Roger explained the position.

"Well Smith," said the inspector, "I'm quite ready to hear what you have to say, so long as you realise that—"

"It will be taken down in writing and may be used against me at my trial," put in Smith. "I've heard about that often enough to know it by heart. I don't ask for no favour, Mr. Sims. Captain Kent knows why I've come here, and that's enough for me."

"All right, then. Now, what have you got to tell us?"

"It's about Mr. Marle, the bookseller, guv'nor. He's a bad 'un."

"If that's all you've got to say—"

"It ain't. I came to warn Captain Kent that Marle's got uneasy about him."

"Why?"

"He's not sure how far the Captain's mixed up with you and Professor Wells in that Garcia business."

"Who murdered Garcia?"

Red hesitated.

"If it'd been Mr. Marle, I'd tell you," he said.

"But you don't want to give anybody else away?"

"That's about it."

"Well, *I'll* tell *you*, then: it was Mr. Thomas Morgan, commonly known as 'Hooky'."

Red Joe started.

"That's right," he admitted, "though I don't know how you knew it."

"That's what I'm here for," said Sims.

"Then," retorted Red Joe shrewdly, "it ain't no good my wasting of your time, guv'nor."

Sims laughed.

"A fair enough answer, Smith," he said. "But I don't know everything yet—though I hope to, soon. The more you can tell us, the better the turn you'll be doing Captain Kent in the long run."

He had struck the right note.

"Arst me whatever you like, guv'nor," said Red Joe, "and I'll tell you all I know."

"Right. What is Marle's game?"

"Make money, so far as I know," was the blunt reply.

"Anything else?"

"In what way?"

"Politics, for instance."

"Foreign spies, and all that, d'you mean, guv'nor?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've always suspected it myself, but Mr. Marle's as close as wax. Garcia may have known, but he didn't let me into his secrets. This pearl business, now; I've always thought there was more to it than the pearls."

"Why?"

"Too bloody clumsy, for one thing. Never knew Mr. Marle to take such a risk before. And I'm told the pearls wasn't so marvellous after all. Pretty good, like, but not the best in the world."

Sims nodded thoughtfully.

"You've only been with Marle since the war, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes, a bit after the war it was when he picked me up."

"How did he treat you?"

"Like muck," said Red, scowling. "I'm a man, I am, not a dog. He was free enough with his money—but money ain't *all* a man wants."

"There's a great deal of truth in that," said the inspector, looking significantly at the other two men. "Now," he went on, "just tell me all you know about the pearl robbery, will you?"

Red Joe complied readily enough. He could tell little that Sims did not know already, but the detective led him by skilful questionings into a rambling statement in the course of which there emerged many incidental points which Sims silently noted.

At last he ceased his questioning.

"Well," he said, "you've been square enough, Smith, and I shan't forget it—though I'm not going to make any promises as to what may happen. I know you've told the truth, because from what I've found out I could have caught you if you'd lied. What are you going to do now?"

Red Joe hesitated, and shuffled his feet in embarrassment.

"Meaning that you ain't going to put me in quod?" he asked.

"Not at present," said Sims plainly. "I may have to, later on."

It was significant that Red accepted without question the implication that the police could lay their hands on him whenever they wished, Roger noted.

"I'm—I'm goin' to look for a job," muttered Red; "on the level," he added.

"Going straight for a bit, are you?" asked Sergeant Andrews.

"No, Mr. Andrews—not for a bit: all the time now," said Red doggedly.

"That's the stuff, Smith," said Sims heartily. "It's never too late to mend, you know."

"I'll give you a hand to find something to do," said the dour Sergeant Andrews unexpectedly.

"*You* will?" cried Red, with such amazement that the detective smiled.

"Yes. We're not altogether swine in the police force, Red."

"Cut along now," said Sims. "But keep in touch with the Yard. Take him outside, Andrews, and tell him what to do."

Red looked at them in turn, shook his head like a man bewildered by a new and amazing aspect of life, and was shepherded expertly out of the room by the detective-sergeant.

CHAPTER XXII

INSPECTOR SIMS wasted no words.

"Interesting enough," he said, "Red Joe coming along to you like that. But we can talk about that some other time. Tell me, when you last saw Miss Fayne, did she say anything to you about going away?"

"Going away? No," said Roger, greatly surprised. "Where the devil should she go to?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Sims replied.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that she and Mr. Gregory Marle have vanished."

"When?"

"Some time between late last night and this morning—I mean, I know that Marle was in London up to a late hour last night, and this morning I am told he has gone."

"I thought you were having him watched," said Roger.

"So I was," the detective answered shortly.

"My dear fellow," said Roger, "I wasn't trying to be funny. I only meant that I was surprised at Marle being able to get away without your knowing."

"Well, it simply shows that Marle isn't going to be an easy fish to land."

"But I don't understand why—" Roger had begun, when the sound of the desk telephone cut him short.

"Who?" asked Sims, at the instrument. "Oh, Mr. Felle. All right; send him up."

A moment later the inspector might have been forgiven for imagining that the doorkeeper had obeyed his order literally and "sent up" Peter in a balloon, for that young gentleman fairly hurled himself into the detective's room.

"I say," he cried, without bothering about formal greetings, "I say—she's disappeared!"

"We know that," answered Roger gloomily.

"Oh, you know it, do you?" said Peter.

dashed. "Well, what's going to be done about it, since you know all about it?"

"Stop a moment," interposed the inspector; "I'm not so sure that we *do* know all about it. *Who* has disappeared, Felle?"

"Bel Dene, of course," Peter answered in surprise; "who did you think I meant?"

"I thought you meant Miss Fayne," Roger explained. "She's disappeared, too. So has old Marle."

Peter sat down.

"London's getting very empty, it seems," he remarked lightly, but Sims realised his anxiety.

"Tell us what you know," he directed.

"I got a 'phone message from Miss Marchant early this morning asking me to come round at once. I buzzed about, leapt into the car, and toiled along to the *Claribel*. You know Miss Marchant and Miss Dene live near there? They have rooms together. Well, about the middle of the night, Bessie says, they were knocked up by a messenger who brought a note from Pamela Fayne—"

"Did Miss Marchant *see* the note?" Sims put in.

"No. Bel read it to her when she awoke her—when Bel awoke Bessie, I mean. In the note Miss Fayne said her guardian, old Marle, had been taken suddenly ill; she had sent for a doctor and all that, but was very much worried, and would Bel come and keep her company until they knew what the doctor's verdict would be. Bel hopped into her clothes and went off in a taxi at once."

"Where did she get the taxi?"

"The messenger came in it, and waited for her."

"Who was the messenger?"

"Small, thin man, so far as Bessie could see. She didn't take particular notice of him. He was standing beside the cab with his coat collar turned up and his hands in his pockets."

"Both hands, or one hand?" asked Sims quickly.

"I don't know," answered Peter.

"Well, go on."

"This morning, early, Bessie telephoned to Marle's place. The housekeeper said that Mr. Marle and Miss Fayne had gone away unexpectedly on business very late last night. As to Bel Dene, she had not heard or seen anything of her. Then Bessie 'phoned to me."

"And she's heard nothing from Miss Dene?"

"Nothing at all."

"I don't see why, if Marle wanted to bolt, he should take Bel Dene with him, as well as—as Pamela," said Roger, coloring a little as he used the girl's Christian name. Roger was oddly shy at times, for a soldier.

"I don't suppose you do," Sims answered; "perhaps I'd better tell you."

WITHOUT disclosing the girl's real name—for that, he felt, was a secret she only had the right to divulge—the inspector gave the two friends a brief outline of her story, and of the trap she had helped him to set for the old bookseller.

"He didn't fall into your trap, however," Peter remarked. "There was no burglary at the *Claribel*, or Bessie Marchant would have told me."

"You are partly right and partly wrong," Sims explained. "Mr. Marle, I admit, was too clever to fall into the pit I dug for him. Nevertheless, the *Claribel* was entered—though not exactly burgled—during the night."

"The devil it was!" cried Peter. "Who by?" he added ungrammatically.

"By me, for one," replied the inspector.

"Stout fellow," said Peter, staring. "Do you pick pockets in your spare time?"

Sims laughed.

"What happened was simply this," he explained. "I hoped that Mr. Marle might be tempted to enter the *Claribel* himself. Of course, one reason he sent Red Joe there was to try and get an impression of the doorkey, and Red evidently succeeded. Unfortunately, Mr. Marle apparently saw through my scheme, for he sent one of his men instead."

"How do you know all this?" Peter demanded.

"I was in the *Claribel* myself at the time, with Andrews," said Sims patiently.

"What, had *you* got a key as well?" cried Peter helplessly, but Roger cut in.

"For the love of Mike, shut up, Peter," he said, "and let Sims go on."

"Well," the inspector continued, "the good Mr. Marle evidently decided to play for safety. He sent round one Hooky Morgan, with instructions to get the pearls if they were there, and come away, which he very faithfully did."

"You didn't think it worth while to arrest him?" Roger asked.

"No. I want Marle first; his assistants are comparatively unimportant."

"What did you do then?"

"I went home to bed. To be honest with you, I didn't anticipate any fresh move on Marle's part until today."

At this point a clerk entered and handed the inspector a slip of paper.

Sims glanced at it and sprang up.

"I'll have to leave you fellows," he said hurriedly, "Kent, will you go up to Marle's shop and have a casual chat with his assistant, Foster. Don't pretend you know that Mr. Marle has bolted. Just poke about among the books, let Foster talk, and pick up any information you can. Felle, go and tell Miss Marchant to carry on as best she can, and above all not to appear surprised at her friend's absence. Tell her to say, if anybody asks, that Miss Dene has gone away for a few days to see a sick friend. Ring me up about four o'clock, both of you, in case of developments. Now, don't worry about the girls: we'll soon find out where they are, and you may be sure that, with all his faults, old Marle won't let them come to any harm."

He hustled the friends down to the courtyard, bustled them away before they quite knew what had happened, and sprang into a motor car in which Andrews was waiting for him.

"As quick as you like," he said to the driver, and the car slid out of the courtyard on to the Embankment and throbbed away toward the city.

"So Marle set fire to his Thames Street office then?" he said.

Andrews nodded.

"Yes. A very neat affair we shall find it, I think," he said, "from what I hear. Odd fellow, Marle: he never wastes effort. Even this fire was practically confined to his own bit of the building, judging by the report. Some men would have burned the whole place down."

They were not long in reaching Lower Thames Street, where a helmeted fireman and a constable were still in charge. The fire, they learned, had broken out in the early hours of the morning, in the upper part of the old house, the offices of Mr. T. Morgan, Agent.

A fire in the city is always a matter of some anxiety to the authorities, for in that congested area a comparatively small blaze may easily grow into a disastrous conflagration. A strong force of firemen was hurried to the spot, with their appliances, and although the flames burned fiercely enough they were soon mastered. A fused electric wire igniting the woodwork of the old house was, according to the official theory, the cause of the outbreak.

LEAVING the fireman and the constable in the corridor—for the floors still stood—Sims and Andrews entered the offices and surveyed the masses of charred furniture and wet ashes. As is often the case, the flames had shot hither and thither capriciously, sparing a corner here and there. The inner room had suffered most, and of the ledgers and files of papers there was not a decipherable sheet. The great safes were fire-proof, but although Sims arranged that they should be removed to Scotland Yard and opened by an expert, he knew well enough that Mr. Marle would have left nothing in them of an incriminating nature.

Returning to the outer office, which had suffered less, he looked about him for a duster or other cloth with which to remove some of the dirt he had picked up while poking about among the debris. A ragged old curtain still hung at the window, but as he touched it the supports gave way and its heavy wooden rod fell, narrowly missing the detective's head, and bringing down in its fall an old-fashioned type of ship's lantern which had hung on the wall until its metalwork was rusty. Mechanically Sims tried to save the lamp, but it crashed to the floor, its glass smashing into a score of pieces.

The inspector picked it up, looked at it, and was about to toss it aside; then he stopped and uttered a clipped word of surprise as he examined the broken lamp more closely.

"Cut yourself, sir?" asked Andrews, appearing from the inner room at the sound of the crash.

"No. Just knocked down an old lantern, that's all," said the inspector carelessly. "Well, I don't think we need spend any more time here," he went on. "That was a neat little arrangement of Marle's—that alarm clock device."

"Yes," Andrews agreed, with professional approval, "and not at all noticeable.

Apparently he only had to wind the clock, set the alarm for the hour he wished, and connect it with the battery. Then he, or whoever it might be, walked out, and in due time the alarm went off, the circuit was made, the battery did its work, and a nice little fire started. The firemen would find the remains of a clock, and of bits of wire and things, but they would be so twisted and charred that they might be almost anything from a typewriter to a wireless set."

"A very efficient person, Mr. Marle," Sims assented, and turned to leave the room.

"Taking that with you, sir?" asked Andrews, with a discreet grin at his superior's absentmindedness, for the inspector was still carrying the broken lantern.

Sims smiled.

"Yes," he said, "I think I'll take it—as a souvenir of Mr. Marle and the good Hooky."

Chuckling to himself at Andrews' discomfited astonishment, he led the way downstairs, entered the waiting car, and returned to Scotland Yard.

CHAPTER XXIII

When Claribel Dene received the message asking her to go at once to the comfort and help of Pamela Fayne her first impulse, naturally enough, was to refuse. It seemed too much like putting her head into the lion's mouth. Not that she suspected the genuineness of the message. That it could have come from Mr. Marle himself instead of from his ward did not occur to her. Bel was shrewd enough, as Sims had recognised; but she knew of no reason why the bookseller should suspect her of being in league with his enemies, or of knowing anything about his private proceedings.

It was, first of all, a natural hesitation on the part of the fly to walk into the spider's parlour; and secondly, a doubt as to what Inspector Sims would wish her to do, that made her hesitate.

Mr. Marle's sudden illness had upset her calculations. She was not without an uneasy suspicion that the letter she had given to him at Sims' request might have contained some threat or warning which had brought on a seizure. Mr. Marle was no longer young. She could not pretend to any sympathy with the man himself, but she realised what a shock any such sudden illness would be to Pamela Fayne, who knew the bookseller only as a kind and considerate guardian. If, therefore, she had been an indirect cause of Mr. Marle's illness, she felt it all the more incumbent on her to lend Pamela what aid she could.

As to Inspector Sims, she reflected, she must communicate with him at the first opportunity; it was even possible that under the bookseller's roof she might pick up some scrap of information which would prove of value to the detective.

These thoughts flashed rapidly through the girl's mind, and she made her decision with a rapidity that greatly relieved Mr. Marle's messenger, who was none other than Hooky Morgan.

It did not take Bel long to dress, and to wake Bessie Marchant and explain what had happened. She promised to telephone to Bessie by breakfast time, ran downstairs, and jumped into the waiting taxicab.

Hooky Morgan had explained that he was Mr. Marle's valet, and Bel, who knew little of the bookseller's domestic arrangements, had no reason to doubt the statement. Hooky said a word to the chauffeur, stepped into the vehicle, and sat himself down with the unobtrusively respectful air of the good servant on one of the little folding seats, with his back to the driver, and the cab rolled away.

If Bell had needed reassurance, the vehicle itself would have provided it. To all appearance it was an ordinary taxicab; she had noticed the ticking of its meter as she stepped in. The driver, a redfaced fellow with the incurious eye of a bored man whose only ambition is to finish his night's duty and get off home to bed, had barely glanced in her direction as she came out of the house.

But Bel had not fully realised the artistic simplicity of Mr. Marle's methods.

The cab sped with smooth swiftness through the almost empty streets, and Bel lost herself for a few minutes in a deep consideration of the events into which she had been so strangely drawn.

She looked up with a start. Blinds had fallen noiselessly over the windows, and at the same moment an electric lamp glowed in the roof of the car.

"What's that for?" she demanded of her companion.

"To prevent you from looking out, and other people from looking in," Hooky explained, dropping his respectful manner and showing his yellow teeth in a sly grin.

Just then the car slackened speed slightly and turned a corner. Bel acted quickly. As Hooky swayed to one side, the girl struck him a sharp blow on the side of the head. He lost his balance, and put out his right hand to steady himself against the side of the car. As he did so, Bel leaned forward and tugged at the handle of the opposite door, intending to throw herself out and risk the consequences of a fall. But although the handle turned, the door was immovable.

She sank back in her seat as Hooky recovered himself with a snarl.

"Don't you try that on again, missy," he said, "or it'll be the worse for you."

There was no bluster in his tone, but he spoke with a cold venom that made the girl, plucky though she was, recoil as though she had touched an adder.

"Look at this," he went on.

He lifted his left arm, the end of which, she now remembered, had been buried in his coat pocket. In place of a hand there glittered a short, thin knife, tempered to the keenness of a razor.

"Another move from you, and I'll cut your throat," he said. "I'd do it now, but for the chief's orders. But if you behave yourself, you'll be all right—until he decides what's to happen to you. If not—"

His pause was sufficiently significant, and Bel clenched her hands to keep from crying out.

So they sat, each silently watchful of the other, while the car rushed on at what had now become an almost dangerous speed.

Bel thought that if she lived to be a hundred she would never forget that drive. To see one's danger starkly facing one, and to meet it with firmness, needs physical courage; to await calmly a peril the more vaguely terrible because it is unknown requires a mental effort increasing as the suspense is prolonged.

AT LAST the speed moderated, and it was evident that the chauffeur was picking his way with some care. Once or twice the car rocked, as though passing over rough ground, and presently it stopped.

Hooky stooped. Apparently he touched some spring or lever which Bel did not see, for at once the blinds glided back into their sockets and the light in the roof went out.

Opening one of the doors, Hooky stepped out and spoke to the driver.

Then he put his head into the car again.

"Come out," he said curtly, but more as a man heavily preoccupied than with deliberate rudeness. Bel felt—as, indeed, she was soon to feel more than once—that she was merely a pawn in some great game. As long as she made no effort to move except as she was bid, she might fear nothing: unless, of course, it became expedient to sacrifice her to the exigencies of the game. The girl's high spirit rebelled against such moral extinction. She would show Mr. Marle, she resolved, that even a neglected pawn may sometimes mean the loss of a game.

For the moment, there was nothing to be done but to comply with Hooky's directions. That sinister looking knife, fastened in place of his hand, was again concealed in his pocket; but Bel was under no illusion as to his ability and readiness to use it.

Stepping out of the car, she looked about her quickly, half expecting that Hooky would blindfold her in a moment. But that precaution was needless. It was still dark, although the hour was advanced; Bel, coming from the lighted interior of the cab, could scarcely see the ground on which she stood.

Taking her left hand in his right, and advising her to walk carefully, Hooky led the girl forward. As her eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness she made out dim shapes about her, and half stumbled once or twice against the rubbish scattered about what seemed to be a large, walled yard.

Hooky was making for a spot where an oil lantern swung from a pole, dimly illuminating only its immediate neighbourhood.

A soft murmur puzzled the girl until they reached the lantern. Then she found that they were standing on a small wharf, against which water lapped gently.

Beside the wharf lay a long, low object, which Bel recognised as a motor boat. She was a powerful looking craft, decked and cabined. On her fore-deck some cases were lashed down and covered with a tarpaulin, and other packages lay on the wharf beside her.

Her deck was almost flush with the edge of the wharf to which she was moored, and Hooky directed the girl to step aboard.

She did so, and at that moment the driver of the cab, who had followed them, carrying a bag, drew Hooky aside for a whispered conversation.

For a moment Bel considered the chances of a desperate dash for freedom. Where she was she had not the faintest idea. If she could once get beyond the enclosing wall, it was possible that her cries for help might be heard. She glanced at Hooky; his back was turned to her as he listened attentively to what the chauffeur was saying.

Collecting all her courage, she took a step toward the edge of the wharf, casting a final glance about her as she did so. Then she stopped, her heart thumping. The edge of the tarpaulin covering the cases on the forehold had moved a little, and a pair of half-veiled eyes, set in a ghastly pale face, stared at her over the blue barrel of an automatic pistol. Slowly the lips twisted into a significant grin, the pistol was lowered, and the flap of the tarpaulin fell into its place. Bel shivered, thankful for her escape.

The next moment Hooky turned, sprang on to the deck, and motioned to the girl to follow him. Mindful of the watcher under the tarpaulin, she did so meekly.

Entering the after cabin, Hooky switched on the electric light. The windows were heavily curtained, and not a glimmer could be seen from the outside.

It was a roomier cabin than Bel had expected, with a table in the center and cushioned lockers on each side. At the end was a door, and this Hooky unlocked. Beyond was a tiny apartment, just big enough to hold a berth, a wash-basin and a small table that folded away against the side of the boat.

"Go in there," said Hooky. "Nobody will interfere with you if you keep quiet."

Without more words he left her, locking the door behind him.

He had left the electric globe above the table burning, and Bel threw herself on the berth and wondered what was going to happen next.

For perhaps half an hour she lay there. Then she started up at the sound of steps on the deck above her, and presently muffled voices in the larger cabin. Soon afterwards the key turned in the lock of her door and Hooky appeared. Evidently someone else closed the door behind him, for Bel was unable to see what was going on in the cabin.

Hooky bore a cup of steaming tea in one hand and a plate of sandwiches in the other.

"There you are," he said gruffly. "You'd best make a meal while you can, for you won't get another for a good few hours."

He put down the food and had turned to go when a thought struck him.

"You needn't be afraid to eat it," he said, with a sour grin; "it isn't poisoned."

The door closed, and Bel again heard the key turn in the lock.

She looked at the sandwiches and suddenly realised that she was hungry. For a moment she hesitated, but commonsense told her that if her captors had decided to kill her they had only to knock her on the head and drop her overboard.

She sipped the tea. It was too hot to drink, so while she waited for it to cool she attacked the sandwiches, and devoured every crumb. Then, finding the tea drinkable, she emptied the cup thirstily.

Comforted by the food, she set herself to consider her position. But, instead of finding her brain refreshed and stimulated, she was conscious of a growing drowsiness, against which she struggled vainly.

When, a little later, Hooky looked into the little cabin, she was lying on the berth, breathing regularly in a profound slumber. The drugged tea had done its work.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN Bel stirred and opened her eyes she could not at first understand why the berth on which she lay moved rhythmically up and down.

Then, with a start, she remembered the events of the night before.

Sitting up, she drew the curtain that hung over the port beside her and looked out. A tumbling sea, glittering in the declining sunshine, met her gaze.

She gazed at her wrist watch, which she had fortunately wound before going to bed on the previous night; it was half past three. She had slept, therefore, about twelve hours.

Glancing round, her eyes fell on the wash-basin. Beside it a freshly-laundered towel had been placed. Odd people these, she reflected with a whimsical smile, who decoyed and drugged you, and then gave you a clean towel to dry yourself with. There was scented soap, too, in a little box, and Bel had a pocket comb in her handbag, which had not been taken from her.

The wash refreshed her, and she examined herself, not without satisfaction, in the hanging mirror over the basin.

Sitting down on the berth again, she looked at the door, and was surprised to see something white attached to the handle. She had not noticed it when she awoke, but now she slipped from the berth and found that it was an envelope addressed to herself.

Inside was a letter, which she read with growing astonishment. It was from Mr. Marle, written in the bookseller's precise and rather old-fashioned hand, and ran:

> Dear Miss Dene—I must offer my apologies for the unceremonious way in which I induced you to accompany us on this little cruise. But I feared that you might refuse a more formal invitation.
>
> Let me congratulate you on the ingenious ruse by which you and the good Mr. Sims hoped to entrap me. I can afford to be good-humoured about it, since it did not deceive me.
>
> But even if circumstances have placed us in opposing camps, there is no reason why we should not observe the courtesies of war. You will admit, I think, that I have made every possible effort to spare you discomfort.
>
> In return, may I beg your help in a matter which involves no disloyalty to your friends?
>
> We have, I venture to claim, one quality in common: our affection for Pamela. As I am sure you believe, she has no knowledge of any of my activities beyond the world of books. Unhappily, it may not be possible to keep her in ignorance much longer, but I suggest that we need not undeceive her just yet.
>
> We shall land tonight, and I promise you that I will then discuss the position with you, and if you wish to end the truce, you will be free to do so.
>
> If, as I hope, you agree to my suggestion, I suggest that you open the door of your cabin, which has been unlocked. In the main cabin you will find Pamela, who has no idea that you are here. It is unnecessary for me to suggest any of the explanations which will so readily occur to you.

If Mr. Marle, tranquilly settled at the steering-wheel of the boat, could have looked into Bel's cabin, he would have smiled sardonically. For the girl behaved exactly as he had foreseen.

She flushed angrily, threw the letter on the floor—and then her lips curved into a smile of unwilling amusement.

The coolness of the man!

He dragged her out of bed in the middle of the night, locked her into a stuffy little cabin, and then calmly invited her to help him to keep Pamela in the dark about it.

And the worst of it was, the man knew she would do it!

After all, Pamela wasn't to blame, and the longer she could be kept out of the affair the better. Bel hesitated a moment more: then, opening the door, she walked into the larger cabin.

"Bel!"

With a cry that was half amazement and half welcome, Pamela rose from the cushioned locker on which she had been reclining, and kissed her friend.

"But whatever are you doing here? And why didn't you tell me you were coming?" Pamela went on.

"A little surprise, old thing," Bel answered airily. "I didn't decide to come until the last moment."

"But," said Pamela, "Uncle Gregory—" (for by that name she had always addressed her guardian) "—Uncle Gregory didn't know himself until last night about this business."

"I know," Bel agreed; "isn't it a lark?" And she wondered uneasily in what way Mr. Marle had accounted to his ward for their sudden departure. It was all very well for him to rely on her, Bel, to make up a sufficiently plausible excuse for her presence, but she wished the bookseller had not had quite such a flattering opinion of her resourcefulness.

But both Mr. Marle and she had reckoned without their host, so to speak.

PAMELA FAYNE was a girl of many reserves. Behind the inherited control which was the heritage of generations of her father's stock lay a passionate nature which had bloomed under Eastern skies and in a land where deceit was almost a part of the air she breathed. But she lacked neither courage nor commonsense.

"Bel," she said plainly, "there's something in all this that I don't understand. Uncle Gregory said he had to go to France at once, to buy a book he'd been told about, before the other dealers heard of it. He said it was important that nobody else should know he had gone until it was all settled, and he'd got the book in his possession. And he asked me if I'd come and keep him company."

"Exactly," said Bel, trying to look as if she'd heard all this before.

"I think I believed him," Pamela went on thoughtfully. "I wanted to believe him," she added, and Bel winced at the note in her friend's voice.

"Of course you did—" she began vaguely, and stopped abruptly, for Mr. Marle was standing at the cabin door, regarding them with an odd smile. He had called Hooky from the engine to take the wheel, and had come down to see how Bel had received his letter.

For a moment there was an awkward silence.

"Well," said the bookseller, taking out his snuffbox and addressing his ward, "I am sure you were surprised to find that Miss Dene had given us the pleasure of her company on our little excursion."

"I don't think I am surprised at anything you do," replied Pamela, surprisingly.

Mr. Marle's eyes narrowed, but he still smiled gently.

"Old men often become eccentric, I know," he said, "but I had hoped that I was bearing my years easily."

Pamela made a sudden gesture of impatience.

"Why don't you tell me the truth?" she cried. "Do you think I'm a child?" Her voice softened. "You—you have been very good to me," she said, "and I would do anything I could to help you, unless—"

"*Unless?*" Mr. Marle repeated, as she stopped. "Unless? That is a suggestive word, my dear Pamela. Will you not finish what you were going to say?"

"Oh, I don't know how to say it," cried the girl. "I mean—"

"You mean that you would help me unless—I am such a wicked person that I don't deserve your help?"

Pamela's silence was a sufficient reply.

Mr. Marle turned to Bel.

"Our little surprise has not been an unqualified success," he said.

"Surprise!" cried Pamela, before Bel could speak. "I am tired of surprises! What are you doing? What are all these mysteries? Do you think I'm blind? Ever since the night when that man Garcia was murdered—"

"Ah, so we come back to the man Garcia, do we? But what makes you think he was murdered? The newspapers said—"

"The newspapers may say what they like," Pamela cried. "You thought I did not see you that night—"

Despite his self-command, Mr. Marle started at her words.

"You saw me?" he demanded.

"Yes. It was just after I nearly fell over his body. You were standing in a doorway, watching Captain Kent and Mr. Felle when they found him."

"And you think I killed him?"

Pamela hesitated.

"I didn't think so—then," she murmured.

"And now?"

"Why did you pretend not to know anything about it, and to be afraid that Gerald Foster killed him?" she asked plainly.

"There were certain reasons for that," the bookseller answered. "But have I ever lied to *you*, Pamela?" he added.

The girl's clear eyes searched his.

"I do not think so," she admitted.

"Then let me assure you that I am not lying when I swear to you that I did not kill Garcia."

"Then why—?"

"Why was I there? I was there to see Garcia killed," he said sternly. "Garcia was a bad man. He betrayed the trust placed in him, and was punished. Now listen, Pamela. If I could, I would have kept these things from you. That is why I asked Miss Dene not to tell you how she came to be here. But you must understand that if I deceived you, I did it for your own comfort. But I make no apology, I ask no help—*I fear no one!* Understand that, both of you. I have chosen my own path in life, and no man shall turn me from it. Since you suspect so much, you may as well know more. Miss Dene, you may tell Pamela what you like: it matters nothing to me. You will soon find that your friends have been foolish to interfere with my plans. But of that I will speak at another time. This evening we shall land on the French coast, at a place where I have a house. You will both be fairly comfortable there, and all I ask is that you will make no effort to escape. Should you do so in my temporary absence, Morgan will not hesitate to stop you by any means which may be necessary—and I am afraid you will find that his methods are more effective than pleasant."

He had spoken calmly, but now a sudden access of anger overcame him.

"You have great faith in Mr. Sims and his mob of professional detectives and amateur blunderers," he cried, turning to Bel Dene. "Well, I have put his friend the professor out of the running, and if Sims is not careful I will deal with him even more severely. Very soon he will find that I am a dangerous man to attack. As for you—I am sorry for you, and that is why I have treated you gently. Your father was a great man, Miss Dene, and nobody regretted his death more than I did."

"Yet you killed him," said Bel coldly, "as surely as though you had shot him dead."

Marle shrugged his shoulders.

"So you know—" he began, and stopped. "Believe me," he went on, "I did not, and could not, foresee that your father would take the matter so much to heart. To suspect him was so utterly absurd."

"He did not think so."

"So that is why you are against me? I see. Well—"

He paused again, and thought for a few moments.

"I will leave you now," he said at last. "Perhaps we may talk of these things more coolly when we have time for reflection. In the meantime, let me assure you that everything possible will be done to make you comfortable."

He bowed, and left the cabin.

CHAPTER XXV

FOR an hour the two girls sat in earnest conversation.

Bel felt that to Pamela anything was better than the secret doubts which had oppressed her, and she told the girl plainly as much as she herself knew about the situation, concluding with an account of her own abduction.

She had hardly finished when the door opened and Hooky Morgan entered with the materials for a quite appetising tea.

"Now, don't be silly, Pamela," said Bel firmly, as her friend turned away in disgust. "There's no sense in starving ourselves, you know. We may want all our strength presently, if we get a chance to help the others," she added in a whisper.

Pamela, recognising the sound sense of this hint, made a sufficiently good meal, and felt much better when she had finished.

When dusk fell Hooky again came in, saw that the portholes were covered, and switched on the electric light.

"Mr. Marle says he'll accept your promise not to pull the curtains aside," he said, with the air of a man performing a highly distasteful task.

"And if we don't promise?" asked Bel.

"You'll sit in the dark," Hooky replied.

"Then you may tell him we promise," said Bel. "And thank him for trusting us, please," she added, laughing.

"It's more than I'd do," Hooky assured her with a scowl.

On deck Mr. Marle was at the wheel. The boat was travelling slowly, for he did not wish to make the land until after nightfall.

There was no sign of the lights which every vessel is required to carry at sea. Mr. Marle was keeping out of the usual run of other craft, and he hoped that his own low-lying boat would escape observation. He and Hooky continually scanned the sea for the lights of steamer or windjammer, prepared at once to alter their course and give the stranger a wide berth.

The time slipped by, and at last Mr. Marle threw on the full power of his engine, glanced at his compass and swung his wheel round. The boat shot forward, and within the hour they were running down the French coast. Hooky stood in the bows, peering ahead, and occasionally calling in a low voice to his chief as he picked up a familiar landmark.

Giving the lights of a busy little port a wide berth, Mr. Marle again edged in towards the shore, and crept along at a few knots an hour. Then, taking a wide curve with the accuracy of thorough familiarity with the tide, he ran the boat into a tiny bay, so small that it was hardly visible a little distance from shore.

Hooky threw out fenders, but even in the darkness Mr. Marle made no mistake, and the boat nosed slowly in, rounded a little jetty of stones and concrete, and stopped. Hooky sprang ashore and quickly made her fast.

While he did so, Mr. Marle descended the companion and entered the cabin.

"We have arrived," he said. "If you will come with me, I will take you to more comfortable quarters. Morgan will bring Pamela's bag, and I think we shall be able to find enough necessaries for Miss Dene to go on with until we can replenish her wardrobe a little."

The two girls followed him on deck, and he assisted them to land and then led the way up a paved path. Presently there loomed out of the darkness a flight of stone steps, with a dark bulk above them.

Climbing the steps, they reached a rambling, old-fashioned house, once the chateau of some seigneur who had probably spent most of his time in the gay salons of Paris.

Mr. Marle opened a door at the back of the house and ushered the girls into a flagged kitchen, where a bright fire blazed cheerfully in a wide, old-fashioned fireplace.

A little old woman, with workworn fingers and bowed shoulders, shot a glance at the girls from her beady eyes as she bobbed a greeting to Mr. Marle.

"*Bon soir, Jeanne,*" said the bookseller.

"*Soir, m'sieur,*" she replied, apparently not at all surprised at his arrival, and Mr. Marle poured out a flood of fluent *patois* too rapidly for Bel or Pamela to catch more than a word here and there.

"If you will go with Jeanne," he went on, turning to the girls, "she will show you your rooms. Jeanne looks after this place for me, and as a rule we get extra help when I have a party here. At the moment, however, I am afraid we must dispense with that luxury. I ought to tell you that we are rather lonely here; the nearest village is three miles away, and I have cultivated a reputation for eccentricity that effectively protects me from intrusive visitors. It would therefore be useless for you to attempt to obtain help from outside. Besides, Morgan will remain here with you. For the rest, the house is fairly comfortable, and there are some books and other things which I hope you may find interesting. There is a walled garden, too, which is at your disposal. I have to make a short journey, but I hope to return shortly, and we can then discuss our future plans. I hope you will believe me when I repeat that although you must regard yourselves as prisoners, I want your captivity to be as little irksome as possible."

BEL and Pamela followed the old woman out of the room, and Mr. Marle hurried into the courtyard of the house. At one side was a garage, in which stood a powerful touring car. Hooky was busy filling the tank with petrol, and in a few minutes she was ready for service.

"You'll stay here, Morgan," said Mr. Marle, as he adjusted a pair of goggles. "See that Jeanne looks after Miss Fayne and Miss Dene properly. You understand?"

Hooky nodded sullenly. He did not approve of the presence of such inconvenient witnesses in his chief's retreat.

"If all goes well," Mr. Marle continued, "I ought to be back in a couple of days."

Adding some brief instructions, he drove out of the yard and the big car was soon humming swiftly toward Paris.

The old bookseller possessed remarkable powers of endurance, and the few hours sleep he had snatched during the crossing, while Hooky relieved him at the wheel, had refreshed him; nevertheless when at last he drove into the French capital, after halting only once for a hurried meal *en route*, he was not sorry to hand over his car to the care of the servants at the quiet hotel he had chosen not far from the Gare St. Lazare.

The sheets in his bedroom looked cool and inviting, but even then he did not allow himself immediate repose. A cold bath refreshed him, and he sat down and wrote a letter, which he sealed with an antique ring he always wore. This letter he placed in another envelope, with a separate sheet of paper on which he scribbled a few lines. Closing the second envelope, he took it down to the *concierge* in the hall and directed him to have it posted without delay.

This done, he went to bed and slept peacefully for six hours.

When he awoke he sent two telegrams. Then he idled away his time between the bookshops and the theatres until he received a reply to one of his wires, and ordered his car to be got ready.

He drove back to the coast at a comparatively leisurely pace, and it was dark when he reached the neighbourhood of the old chateau. Nevertheless, while still a mile from the house he deliberately extinguished the powerful headlights of the car, leaving only a small pilot lamp burning. He was well acquainted with the road, and had no desire to attract unnecessary attention.

The big car slipped almost silently along the narrow country road, and Mr. Marle had just turned the last corner before reaching the house when the dark figure of a man lurched across in front of the wheels. The car was moving slowly, and Mr. Marle shut off his engine and applied his brakes, but his cry of warning was too late. The man hesitated for a moment in bewilderment, then sprang aside, but the car struck him a glancing blow, sending him spinning into the hedge.

With a muttered curse Mr. Marle jumped out and went to his help. The stranger lay in a crumpled heap, but whether merely stunned or more seriously hurt it was impossible to say.

After a moment's hesitation, Mr. Marle heaved the supine body into the car, got in himself, and drove to the chateau.

There he pressed a bell concealed in the woodwork of the outer gates set in the high, spiked wall which surrounded the house and grounds. Presently Hooky appeared and opened the gates.

Mr. Marle drove in.

"There's a man in the back of the car," he said. "Knocked him down on the road. Help me to get him out."

Hooky stared in amazement.

"Why didn't you leave him there, chief?" he demanded.

"And have him found by somebody, dead or alive?" said Mr. Marle angrily. "Don't be a fool, Morgan. If I hadn't brought him here there'd have been an inquiry, and the devil to pay. If he's alive, we'll patch him up and get rid of him. If he's dead we'll bury him in the garden and supply the police with another mystery."

Hooky grinned, and together they lugged the man out of the car and carried him into the lighted garage, where he presently stirred and opened his eyes.

He was a tall, sinewy fellow; elderly, with the appearance of a peasant.

"Who are you?" the bookseller demanded, using the local *patois*.

The man made an uncouth noise and pointed to his mouth.

Mr. Marle took a flask from his pocket and gave him a draught of brandy and water. He drank eagerly, and, struggling into a sitting posture, stretched his limbs with a gesture of evident satisfaction.

"Well, you don't seem to have broken anything," Mr. Marle remarked, and repeated his question.

Again the man uttered an inarticulate noise. Then he fumbled in the pocket of his ragged peasant's blouse and produced a dirty paper which he handed to the bookseller.

"What's this?" asked the latter.

Unfolding the paper, he found inscribed thereon, in the writing of one Gaston Leroux, farmer, a statement that the bearer, Jacques Benoit, generally known as Jacques Sanslangue, had worked for him, Farmer Leroux, during the period of three harvests. Further, that the said Jacques, though stupid and of uncertain temper, and suffering from the affliction of being dumb, was nevertheless of great strength and of an industry remarkable. Wherefore, at the request of the said Jacques, he, Farmer Leroux, had set down these things in writing to enable Jacques (of a most wandering disposition) to obtain work on other farms.

Below this, in different writings, were similar testimonies from other agriculturists —all of whom, it was evident, were more used to gripping a plough handle than a pen.

"So he's dumb, is he?" said Hooky. "Well, he can't talk about this business. Give him fifty francs, Mr. Marle, and let him go."

But Mr. Marle was eyeing Jacques thoughtfully.

"Wait a minute, Morgan," he said in English. "This man may be useful. We want another about the place—he can help with the rough work, and he might be useful in other ways later on. I wouldn't have taken a local man, but this fellow can't talk, and there's a scoundrelly look about him that suggests that he wouldn't be too squeamish if it came to a pinch."

Jacques was certainly not prepossessing. Revived by the brandy, he had got to his feet, and stood peering shortsightedly at the others with a furtive cunning, as he scratched with a dirty forefinger a long jaw which would have been better for a shave. He wore a discoloured blouse and heavy corduroy trousers, and his bare feet were thrust into patched and clumsy shoes. Altogether, Jacques Sanslangue was more likely to excite the suspicion of a *garde champetre* than to win the confidence of a wealthy old gentleman on a lonely road.

"Are you out of a job?" asked Mr. Marle in *patois*.

Jacques nodded in a surly fashion.

"Tramping?" Mr. Marle went on.

Another nod.

"Would you like to work for me?"

In expressive pantomime Jacques imitated the gestures of a man cutting corn.

"No," said Mr. Marle, laughing. "You would look after the garden, clean the motor car, help to stoke the engine that makes the light for the house, and do odd jobs. Wages, double whatever you got on the farm."

A gleam of cupidity flashed into the man's eyes, and he grinned delightedly as the bookseller handed him a twenty franc note.

"That's to go on with," said Mr. Marle.

"Morgan, show him somewhere to sleep, will you—outside the house, in one of the sheds—and tell Jeanne to give him some food. Tomorrow you can set him to work."

Turning on his heel, he entered the house, and sent Jeanne to tell the girls that he hoped they would do him the honor of dining with him, and inspecting the garments he had purchased—with the assistance of the hotel manageress—for Bel Dene.

CHAPTER XXVI

INSPECTOR SIMS had long made a habit of looking cheerful; if a man always looks much the same, he used to say, it is difficult for people to gauge his real feelings.

But, cheerful though he looked, Sims was feeling far from happy as he paced up and down his room at Scotland Yard, an unlighted cigarette between his fingers.

Detective-sergeant Andrews sat in tactful silence, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

"Well," said the inspector at last, "your inquiries haven't carried us much farther, Andrews."

"I'm sorry, sir," said the sergeant.

"Oh, I'm not blaming you," his superior assured him. "You've been thorough enough. If it comes to that, I haven't been any more successful myself. Marle has certainly covered up his tracks pretty cleverly."

"If he made any," put in the sergeant.

"Made any? What do you mean?"

"I mean, he couldn't *leave* a trail if he didn't *make* one."

"Oh, I see. You still think he is lying low in London?"

"I don't know what to think, sir, and that's the truth. Of course, London's the best hiding place in the world if you know where to hide."

"Up to a point, yes; but you must remember that we know most of the places to look in, too. And they've been pretty carefully combed out."

"If he's not in London, how did he get out of it?" propounded the sergeant, knowing that it was a question his superior could not answer.

Sims did not try to do so.

"Did you send for Kent and Felle?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. They should be here at any moment."

"Right. I've got to find them something to do, or they may do something I don't want them to do. 'Satan finds some mischief still—' "

"It's pretty rough on them, with their young ladies missing," Andrews remarked, with the grin of an unattached bachelor. "I'm glad—"

What the sergeant's private source of joy might be was not disclosed, for he was interrupted by the arrival of the two friends. Roger's face was set and stern, and Peter had lost something of his gay good humor; but they were the type that takes its punishment without crying out, whether it be in the gymnasium boxing ring or in the larger arena of life.

Roger, the brief greetings over, questioned Sims with a look.

"No; no news yet, I'm afraid," said the inspector.

"I say," said Peter with some diffidence, "I've got an idea."

"Good," Sims replied. "What is it?"

"Well," Peter explained, "you've covered pretty nearly every way in which Marle could get out of the country—trains, boats, aeroplanes—and you haven't found a trace of him so far. It seems to me that there's only one other way."

"Well?"

"Suppose he went by submarine?"

Roger smiled, but the inspector received the suggestion quite seriously, for he knew that to ridicule an enthusiast is to discourage him from making further suggestions, some of which may be valuable.

"That is quite an interesting idea, Felle," he said, "and I daresay it occurred to Mr. Marle. It would be an excellent way of escaping observation. But the Admiralty tell me that it would be practically impossible. They keep a sharp look out for the building of such craft, and their delivery to whatever power orders them. And when the boats become obsolete, they are generally scrapped. I don't think Marle would have been able to get hold of one."

"It was merely an idea," said Peter.

"And, as I say, a most interesting one," the inspector assured him. "Now, here's another one. The Thames police report that a large motor boat passed down the river on the night, or rather, in the early dawn, of the day on which Marle disappeared."

"By Jove, that sounds like a clue," said Roger eagerly.

"It does," Sims agreed. "It would be an excellent means of escape. Unfortunately the river patrol boat sergeant who noticed the craft had no reason to suspect it. He says it was steered by a man with a yachting cap pulled over his eyes, and a boat cloak turned up round his chin. He admits that he only gave the boat a passing glance."

"Boats on the river have to be registered, don't they?"

"Certainly. And I am having the records searched, of course. But there are scores of boats of that class, and some of them are quite big craft. Their owners often take them for longish trips round the coast. So it is not going to be an easy job to trace her."

"Round the coast, eh?" said Roger, who had been turning the idea over in his mind. "Suppose Mr. Marle had a quiet house somewhere on the coast, he could get at it easily enough by motor boat, without being noticed."

"Quite so," said Sims. "What part of the coast do you suggest?"

"That's rather hard to say," Roger admitted.

"It is," said Sims dryly. "We've asked for any information that is to be had, and we've communicated with the Channel Islands police and the French police, too, but it's rather like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay. However, I was going to suggest a line of inquiry, if you fellows would care to try it."

"Anything would be better than doing nothing," said Roger, with unwonted feeling.

"Well, you've both got cars. Why not make a quiet tour of the coast, and keep your eyes and ears open? Naturally, you would only try the lonelier spots."

"That's a topping idea," Peter exclaimed.

"Mind," Sims warned him, "it's a very thin chance. But if you like to try it, there's no harm done if you fail. Only you must keep in touch with me daily, and for heaven's sake remember you are supposed to be just ordinary motor tourists, and don't give yourselves away."

HE PAUSED to listen to his desk telephone, which had been buzzing insistently while he spoke.

"Who?" he demanded. "Yes, send him up at once."

He put down the instrument.

"It's Red Joe Smith," he explained. "Says he's got something important to tell me."

When Red Joe appeared it was evident that he was considerably excited.

"Morning, gents," he said, ducking his red head.

"Well, Joe; what is it?" asked the inspector.

"I've got a letter for you, guv'nor," Red explained, fumbling in his coat pocket. "It sounds funny," he added, grinning; "it's Mr. Marle as sent me to give it to you!"

"Mr. Marle?" Sims repeated. "Have you seen him, then?"

"No, guv'nor. Nor I don't know where he is. But 'ere's the letter. This first one came to me by post this morning, with the other inside."

Sims took the letters.

The first was a brief order to Red Joe to take the enclosure to Scotland Yard and place it in the hands of Inspector Sims, and then to await Mr. Marle's further orders.

"Hum; posted in Paris," Sims remarked, examining the envelope. Then he opened the sealed enclosure, glanced through its contents, and laid it on the desk before him.

"Well, here's news at last," he said grimly. "Sit down, Red; there's no reason why you shouldn't hear it. Now, listen, all of you," and he read aloud the following letter from the old bookseller:

My dear Mr. Sims—I think you will admit that the rubber we have played has not been a dull one. You took a trick or two with a skill on which I must congratulate you.

But I am afraid I hold better cards than yours.

Nevertheless, I am quite prepared to call it a drawn game if you will agree to the not unreasonable (as I think) conditions which I am going to suggest.

I want the pearls. You want me. We cannot both have what we want.

But you (or those associated with you) also want the society of the two very charming girls who are at present accepting my hospitality.

Those ladies are the trumps with which I propose to take the final trick.

Briefly, then, my suggestion is this: let me return to London and pursue my search for the pearls without molestation, and I will bring Miss Fayne and Miss Dene with me, and leave them free to decide on their future movements. Refuse, and not only will those ladies not return, but I will not even guarantee their safety.

You know me too well to regard this as an empty threat. I wish them no harm; but there are reasons why I can allow no obstacle to hinder me from recovering the pearls.

I am not unmindful of the obligations of your position as a police officer. It may make that position easier if I solemnly assure you that once I have recovered the pearls I intend to abandon for ever the activities which have caused you so much concern. I am an old man, and I propose to devote my remaining years to pursuits which even you would consider legitimate.

I hope (and believe) that you will not dismiss my offer lightly. Should you refuse, I warn you that you must hold yourself responsible for consequences which may be more far-reaching than you imagine.

If, however, you accept my suggestion, I am prepared to rely on your good faith to observe the terms of the bargain. You have only to insert an advertisement in the newspapers I name, addressed to "BIBLIOPHILE," stating that "the books are now available," and signed "Yard," and you will hear from me immediately. The newspapers I suggest are the *Herald* (New York), *Indépendance Belge* (Brussels), *Matin* (Paris), *Tageblatt* (Berlin) *Telegraaf* (Amsterdam), *La Nacion* (Madrid) and *Times* (London).

In conclusion, may I beg you to convey to Professor Wells my hope that he is making a satisfactory recovery. I am glad that your own health has—so far—remained good.

Yours sincerely,
Gregory Marle.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Peter, when the inspector had finished reading the letter.

"What are you going to do?" asked Roger practically.

"I don't know yet," Sims answered, frowning. "It's too serious a question to be decided offhand."

"What's the idea of wanting you to advertise in all those papers?" Peter asked. "He can't be everywhere at once—and besides, you said his letter came from Paris."

"The idea of the newspapers is to prevent us from knowing where he is," Sims explained. "As to the letter coming from Paris, he might have sent it to someone there to post on to Red Joe. By the way, does he suspect you, Joe?"

"I don't know guv'nor," said Smith, shaking his head. "It don't look like it, sending me that letter, but you never know what Mr. Marle's got at the back of his mind."

"Have you ever been abroad with him?"

"No. Hooky Morgan went sometimes, but I don't know where they used to go."

"Whether Mr. Marle suspected Red or not," Andrews put in shrewdly, "he'd be safe enough in sending the letter to him. He'd know that Red would bring it here, whether he was in with us or not."

"That's so," Sims agreed. "Anyhow, the point doesn't matter just now."

"Infernal cheek his sending that message to the professor. Of course you won't give it to him?" said Peter.

"Certainly not. In any case, he's not to be bothered with messages."

"That's right," remarked Roger. "I called at Russell Square yesterday, but the nurse wouldn't hear of my seeing him yet. She's rather a fearsome person."

"She's doing her job, as she was told," said Sims.

"Your two fellows were still there," Roger added. "Having the time of their lives, I should think."

"I'm not taking any more risks," Sims declared, and Peter chuckled suddenly.

"You'd better start having yourself guarded," he said. "Old Marle's hint about *your* health was pretty plain."

"Well, I'm not the whole police force," Sims remarked. "Even if he did get me, there are others who—"

He broke off as a clerk entered the room and handed him a telegram.

Tearing open the envelope, he read the message it contained and placed it on his desk. "I'm going to take a day to think this out," he said. "Kent, you and Felle had better postpone your tour for the moment. Ring me up, both of you, tomorrow morning, will you? And you'd better do the same, Joe. Now, if you'll excuse me, Andrews and I must get on with some other work."

Andrews waited until the others had left the room. Then he looked significantly at the telegram. Sims took it up and handed it to him, and the sergeant's face twisted in a grin.

"Oh," he said, "so Beta Seven has got on the track at last, has he?"

"It looks like it," replied Inspector Sims cheerfully.

CHAPTER XXVII

RELATIONS were strained at Mr. Marle's chateau.

Bel Dene was a prisoner, confined to the house, and Pamela Fayne voluntarily shared her captivity.

It was, Mr. Marle pointed out, Bel's own fault. Strolling in the garden one day she had come upon Jacques Sanslangue at work. The girl had had some money in her handbag when she came away, and it suddenly occurred to her to bribe the man to open the gates and let her out. What she would do then would depend on circumstances, but she hoped to reach some place from where she could telephone to the police.

But Jacques had in the first place appeared to be deeply suspicious of the foreign money she offered him. Then, with slow cunning, he had apparently reflected that if this girl wished to escape from monsieur, then monsieur would probably reward him (Jacques) for preventing her.

So the indignant Bel found her arm gripped by a dirty, but strong hand, and was hauled into the presence of Mr. Marle, where Jacques pointed to her handbag and to the gates, and pretended to run with great swiftness, looking behind him in alarm at intervals. It fell out as he hoped: Mr. Marle did indeed reward him, and he promptly walked three miles to the village and bought much brandy, returning very drunk. Mr. Marle, although angry, reflected that the man could not have talked, and allowed him to sleep off the effect of his potations in an outhouse. For Jacques' prompt realisation, to put it colloquially, of the side on which his bread was buttered had raised him greatly in Mr. Marle's estimation. Here, the bookseller decided, was a tool ready to his hand—blunt, indeed, but capable of being sharpened to just the right degree of keenness.

It appeared, indeed, that Jacques Sanslangue had a stronger head than even Mr. Marle suspected. Hooky had taken a look at him as he lay, snoring heavily, on a bundle of straw, and had then retreated to Jeanne's bright fire, carrying with him a bottle which Jacques had been too drunk to conceal.

Having eaten a hearty supper, he took the bottle from his pocket, pulled the cork and tasted the contents. It contained an excellent brandy. Chuckling at the thought of Jacques' discomfiture, Hooky drew a chair up to the fire, poured out and drank a stiff dose of the brandy, and decided that even if Mr. Marle and he had been forced to bolt from London like rabbits, life still held its little compensations. With this agreeable reflection, Hooky subsided into a slumber so profound that he did not see Jeanne's sly grin or hear her smack her lips as she, in her turn, helped herself to the contents of Jacques' bottle.

But somebody else saw her, and that was Jacques himself, who had recovered from his intoxication with astonishing rapidity. Peering cautiously through the kitchen window, he watched the two people for a few moments, showing no sign of resentment at the loss of his property. Then he directed his glance toward the clock on the mantelpiece. It was nearly eleven o'clock. Pamela and Bel had retired to their room. Mr. Marle was in his study, where he often read until the early hours of the morning.

Turning away, Jacques made his way as noiselessly as possible to the stone steps that led to the little bay where the motor boat lay snugly concealed. Descending them, he entered a shed in which were kept stores of various kinds. Selecting a storm-proof lantern, he filled the container with oil and trimmed the wick.

Then, placing beside him a watch which he produced from the recesses of his clothing, he sat down on a barrel and listened to the music of the water.

For a long time he sat there, motionless but alert, his eyes glancing occasionally at the watch, his ears strained to catch any unusual sound. At last he rose, lighted the lantern, and wrapped it carefully in a piece of canvas, so that it showed no gleam. Then, carrying the lantern, he walked to the end of the little jetty, scrambled over the rough ground beyond it, and stood at the entrance to the bay, gazing out to sea.

It was a dark, squally night, with a tumbling sea and a keen nip in the air, but Jacques heeded the cold as little as the intermittent burst of driving rain that beat on the oilskin coat he had thrown about his shoulders.

Presently it seemed to him that he heard three detonations in rapid succession, as though three chambers of a revolver had been emptied. It might, however, have been his fancy; or it might have been any of the hundred noises that seafarers hear in the night watches. Jacques waited.

Again it came—unmistakable this time to any ears that listened for it—the triple, whiplike crack.

Jacques tore the canvas from the lantern and held it above his head. Almost instantly a light shone from the sea, hung a moment in the blackness, and then vanished.

Jacques draped the canvas round his lantern again, but this time so that its gleam was invisible to the land, but visible from that quarter of the sea in which he had seen the light.

Minute after minute passed, while Jacques eagerly scanned the sea. Suddenly, close to the land and low on the water, a tiny pencil of light appeared, and Jacques caught the sound of oars. Slowly Jacques made his way back to the jetty as the pencil of light crept into the little bay.

The creak of the oars stopped and a low voice called:

"Who is it?"

"Beta Seven," replied Jacques, and a rowboat glided up to the jetty.

INSPECTOR SIMS sprang out, and grasped the hand of the man whose telegram had revealed Mr. Marle's hiding place.

"Splendid work!" he said. "But we'll talk about that later."

Turning, he gave an order, and one of the men came ashore with the boat's painter in his hand and made her fast.

"What next?" Sims asked.

"Straight up to the house," replied the erstwhile Jacques, now Beta Seven. "How about a warrant?"

"I've fixed that up all right with Laporte," Sims explained. "You remember our friend of the Paris police? He's got authority for us to go ahead, and settle the formalities afterwards."

"Right. Will you follow me, then?"

Sims turned to the boat again.

"Come on, you fellows," he said. "Follow up, and don't make a row."

Eagerly Roger and Peter sprang on to the jetty, followed by Sergeant Andrews.

"You brought enough people," Beta Seven remarked, peering at the dim figures.

"Didn't know what trouble there might be," said Sims. "I've got more men on the tug out there, if you want them."

"I certainly don't," replied the other, and led the way to the steps without more ado.

Outside the kitchen window he stopped and looked in. Then he beckoned to the inspector with a quiet chuckle.

On each side of the fireplace sat a snoring figure.

"Hooky Morgan and the housekeeper have been enjoying my brandy," he explained. "I prepared it specially. You needn't bother to handcuff them; they won't move for hours."

Opening the door he stepped in, and led the way to the stairs.

Signing to the others to follow his example, he took off his shoes. Then, keeping to the wall to minimise the risk of creaking boards, the five men mounted to the first floor in single file.

Here a long straight corridor was lit by a shaded globe, and half way down a light shone beneath a closed door.

Outside this door Beta Seven paused until the others had gathered behind him. Then, flinging open the door, he entered.

It was a roomy apartment half bedroom, half study. At the table set under a powerful electric light sat Mr. Marle, studying a black leather volume with the aid of a magnifying glass.

He looked up in astonishment.

"What do you want here?" he began, in *patois*. Then he saw the inspector behind the hulking figure in the dirty blouse, and his face changed. Swiftly his hand fell to a drawer in the desk, but Beta Seven leaped forward and tore the automatic pistol from his grasp. Despite his age, the bookseller fought like a madman, but the odds were too great, and in a few moments he was lying in an armchair, his wrists enclosed in steel handcuffs and his ankles bound together with Andrews' muffler.

Sims stood back and regarded his prisoner.

"I think," he said, "the last trick is ours, Mr. Marle."

The bookseller mastered his anger with amazing self-control.

"You have certainly shown more intelligence than I had expected of a policeman," he said, with a sneer. "I should have remembered that you once had the advantage of studying in Professor Wells' school."

Sims smiled, and glanced at the blue bloused figure of Beta Seven.

That person was behaving singularly. Crossing the room to where there stood a washstand, he was very deliberately washing his face and hands. This done, he drew a case from his pocket and took out of it a pair of goldrimmed spectacles which he adjusted on his nose. Then he snatched up Sims' soft felt hat and drew it over his eyes; held a handkerchief over his shaven chin, and turned to the bookseller.

"Good God!" cried Mr. Marle. "*It's Wells!*"

Roger and Peter, who until then had caught no more than a glimpse of their guide, stepped forward and seized the scientist's hands, hardly able to believe their eyes.

"I'm real, all right," said the professor, smiling. "Your friends did not succeed in killing me, Mr. Marle, but their attack provided me indirectly with an excellent means of disguise. It is true that I missed my spectacles rather badly; but I can see a little without them, and a few headaches were a small price to pay for the pleasure of seeing you again."

The bookseller raised his manacled hands and turned to Sims.

"You will allow me to indulge in my favorite vice?" he asked. "You are five to one."

The professor interposed before Sims could unlock the handcuffs.

"I think Mr. Marle will find that he can get at his snuffbox quite well as it is," he said dryly.

The bookseller shrugged his shoulders.

Bringing his hands to his side, he was able to extract his little box from a waistcoat pocket, open it, and inhale a pinch of the brown powder with evident relish.

"Well, Mr. Sims," he said, "it seems to me that we are still very much where we were—except that you have indulged in the highhanded proceeding of breaking into a private dwelling on French soil."

"As to that," the inspector replied cheerfully, "I have no anxiety. The French authorities are aware of my proceedings."

"Possibly," said the bookseller. "But I fail to see that you have any charge to bring home to me."

"What about abduction?" asked Sims.

"The young ladies? One is my ward, and the other a friend of hers. Why on earth should I abduct them, my dear fellows? I am afraid a jury would think you had got hold of a mare's nest there. But that is a small point. There are many things I could tell you about the criminal world which would be of great service. Forgive me if I say that you do not quite realise how wide my interests have been. Why not strike a bargain? As I told you, I propose to retire—once I have found the pearls—"

"Ah," Sims interrupted, "those pearls, of course. I am afraid you are a little late in the day, Mr. Marle."

For the first time the old bookseller lost his nerve.

"What—what do you mean?" he demanded, his voice trembling. "You do not mean that you have found them?"

Sims put his hand into his pocket and drew out something that rattled as he held it up.

"The pearls!" cried the bookseller.

"Exactly," Sims answered coolly. "You are a great reader, Mr. Marle. Did you ever come across Poe's clever story of the minister who hid a certain document so cleverly as to deceive almost everybody who tried to find it?"

Mr. Marle made an inarticulate noise as he remembered how he had spoken to Hooky Morgan of that very story.

"You will remember," Sims went on, "that it was because that document was almost in full view that nobody found it. Garcia adopted the same principle. He hid it—"

"Where?" cried the bookseller.

"In your own office in the city. You remember, perhaps, an old lantern that hung on the wall in the outer room? The pearls were there all the time."

THE whole truth of the ambitions and intrigues of which that innocent-looking rope of pearls was the centre was locked in the breast of the ashen-faced man who gazed in unutterable despair at the men who watched him in a grave silence that was not without pity.

His snuffbox was still in his left hand. Tapping the lid with his accustomed gesture, he thrust his right thumb and forefinger into the box.

The next moment he had fallen back in his chair.

Professor Wells sprang forward with a cry, and bent over him. Then, with great care he drew from Mr. Marle's left wrist a tiny dart with a needle-like point.

For a few moments no one spoke.

Then Roger pointed to the peaceful, upturned face.

"The Smiling Death," he said.

THE END

Stampeded

A Western that Builds Up to a Stunning Climax

By WALTER W. LIGGETT

"UNSADDLE that horse, Red! Unsaddle right now—pronto!"

"But Miss Kate asked me to saddle it—said she wanted to go riding." The red headed cowboy grinned, but his eyes were sullen.

"Unsaddle that horse!" Happy Henderson repeated. "I'm still foreman on this ranch and you're taking orders from me, don't forget that."

Henderson did not wait to see if his order was executed. Turning his back on the curious group of cowboys gathered around the gate of the horse corral, he strode straight for the Bar U ranch house. He knew he would find Kate Miller on the veranda, booted and spurred, waiting in her modish riding habit for this gallop which he had forbidden.

Henderson's lips were grim and a scowl distorted his handsome, usually good humored face as he purposely strode across the ranch yard. He swore savagely as he heard a snicker from the group of cowboys by the corral. Things had been going wrong ever since Colonel Miller's hurried departure two weeks before on a business trip to Kansas City. Discipline had insensibly slackened, there had been dissension among the boys in the bunk house, and Happy Henderson's own even disposition was fast becoming morose. It didn't make Happy any happier either to realize that Kate Miller was at the bottom of the trouble.

She had arrived two days after the Colonel left, coming straight from an Eastern college to spend the vacation with her father. Although nominally she was chaperoned by old "Aunt Trina," the ranch housekeeper, Happy felt the real responsibility rested on him and already his stalwart shoulders sagged under the burden.

He had known Kate since childhood and always had considered her a child. But she had changed to a young woman in her year's absence in the East, a beautiful young woman, baffling alike to Henderson and old Aunt Trina, who had raised her since her mother had died when she was a baby. Her hair was bobbed, she ventured an occasional cigarette in the privacy of the ranch parlor despite the horrified protests of Aunt Trina and the modernity of her conversation made modest Bob Henderson blush more than once, although afterwards, when he puzzled over her remarks, he never could actually find anything to criticize.

The real trouble was—and even here

Henderson could not accuse her of being deliberately flirtatious—that her merry, dancing blue eyes had enslaved every cowboy on the ranch, Henderson included. Cowboys are notoriously susceptible and although the foreman could not lay his finger on any one thing on which to make an issue, he was well aware that a subtle insubordination was pervading his entire crew. Ranch efficiency had gone from bad to worse since the day of Kate's arrival. But how could he explain this to her father on his return, and how could he stay on the ranch himself without betraying his own regard for Kate? Henderson knew that he loved her, loved her madly, although now his feeling for her was permeated by a strange bitterness.

Only yesterday they had quarreled when he had asked her not to go riding alone. Mexican bandits, some of Villereal's gang, had been reported close to the international line and Happy did not consider it safe for her to range over the southern end of her father's ranch which was bordered by the Rio Grande. Just now, when they were preparing for the fall drive of Colonel Miller's longhorns to the railroad, he could not spare a cowboy to accompany her. He had warned her particularly of the danger, and, when she had laughed at his fears, practically forbidden her to ride alone. And now she had gone over his head, undermined his discipline, by asking "Red" Cooley to saddle her horse. His jaw tightened as he rounded the corner of the veranda. Sure enough, she was there, waiting in her riding habit, and a certain jealous anger reddened his face as he noted the slim lines of her figure.

"MISS Kate," he drawled, doffing his wide brimmed sombrero, and controlling his voice by a strong effort, "I wish you-all wouldn't go riding alone. I reckon you-all don't know how dangerous it is with these greasers sashshaying back an' forth across the border. I—"

"Who told you I intended to ride?" she demanded angrily.

"Why I saw Red saddling your horse," he explained apologetically, but his eyes were steady as he went on. "You shouldn't have asked him to bring around your horse after I asked you not to. It puts me in bad with the boys. Your father wouldn't like it, Miss Kate, and—"

"My father wouldn't like to have you try to order me around the way you've been doing either," she retorted.

"I don't aim to order you 'round, Miss Kate," he answered gently, "but these bandits are powerful dangerous and—"

"I'll take the risk if I feel like it," she interrupted.

"Not while your father's away," he snapped, his jaw suddenly tightening. "I'm responsible for you, Miss Kate and—" He did not finish the sentence. Red Dooley mounted on his own broncho, had just ridden around the corner of the veranda leading Kate's spirited Kentucky thoroughbred. For an instant Henderson's jaw dropped in sheer astonishment, then it closed with a snap like a steel trap, his eyes grew hard and his face paled with rage. But he mastered himself in an instant and when he spoke it was still in the same gentle drawl.

"I reckon you misunderstood me, Red," he said, "Miss Miller isn't going to need that horse. She's changed her mind. She isn't going riding today."

"I am—I am going riding!" Kate cried shrilly, stamping her foot. "I won't have you telling me what—"

"I'm telling Red what to do," Henderson interrupted, "but he seems kind of hard of hearing today." His voice had not raised; outwardly he was still calm.

"Oh, I heard yah, all right," Cooley answered, his impudent grin widening, "but I heard Miss Kate, too, and I reckon—"

"You ain't paid to reckon, Cooley. You're paid to obey orders—my orders, when Colonel Miller's gone. You've disobeyed 'em twice now—deliberately—and you're through. Take those horses back to the stable and then come up to the office and get your time." Henderson's voice was hard as a steel file and his narrowed eyes seemed to flash fire. He took a step forward. For a second Cooley insolently tried to outstare his foreman, then his eyes suddenly dropped, his face changed color, and without a word he wheeled the horses and Henderson could hear them clattering back to the corral. Kate had paled at the sudden clash of wills. She realized the danger she had provoked between these two armed men, yet, as Cooley disappeared she flared forth in a sudden hysterical passion.

"I hate you! I hate you!" she cried.

"You won't need to hate me long, Miss

Kate," he answered wearily, all the steel gone out of his voice, "I—I reckon I'll be leaving as soon as your father gets back." Without another word he turned and started back to the office in the rear of the ranch house. After a long look at his retreating back, Kate suddenly burst into tears and fled into the parlor for the long neglected solace of Aunt Trina's motherly arms.

For five minutes Happy Henderson silently cursed as he wrestled with his self-control in the little adobe office in the rear of the ranch house. Out of the open window he could see Red Cooley standing in the center of the group of cowboys around the corral gate, even hear his mocking laugh. It was obvious that he was not coming to the office to get his pay check. Henderson had hoped to avoid a scene, but now, if he would save the last remnants of his dignity and preserve discipline he must face the issue.

He was ready enough for a personal combat, too ready in fact. A murderous rage burned in his heart. Cooley had deliberately provoked this conflict of authority; sought to humiliate him before the girl; forced Henderson peremptorily to command her not to go riding just when he was assuaging her unreasonable stubbornness. Now she would hate him forever and he must leave this ranch where he had worked for fifteen years.

Cooley had done this, Red Cooley, whom he had hired out of charity, for the man was a roistering bully notorious on both sides of the border for his innumerable escapades. By rights he ought to shoot the skunk. He literally saw red as he paced the little office with clenched hands. But by degrees his habitual coolness reasserted itself.

It would never do to have a shooting affray on the ranch while Kate was there and the colonel was away. Inevitably, gossip would color the circumstances and some scandal might attach to her name. That would be a poor way to repay the colonel for his years of kindness. Yet he must act. He could not permit Red Cooley to remain out there in the corral, swaggering, boasting, disregarding his orders, disaffecting the other men.

Henderson sat down and swiftly computed the man's back pay. Then filling out one of the signed blank checks that Colonel Miller had left at his disposal, he opened the door. For a moment he stood there, then going back to his desk, he unbuckled his belt and laid his long-barreled Colt revolver on the table.

Cooley was armed, armed and dangerous, but there must not be any shooting. Well, he would see that there wasn't. For Kate's sake, for the sake of her name, even though she hated him, he would not shoot this skunk, nor allow Cooley to shoot him, either.

A SUDDEN silence fell upon the group of cowboys as Henderson stepped out of the office door and strode towards them, the green check fluttering in his hand. Purposely, but apparently as though by accident, the other cowboys edged away so as to be out of the possible line of fire. That instinctive action had a deeper significance than words in this border country.

Cooley's ruddy face paled slightly, but he held his ground. Henderson saw that his right hand, hooked in his belt, was almost resting on the butt of his six gun. Then a sudden leer of triumph flashed across Cooley's face as he saw that Henderson was keeping his hand away from his gun belt. The red haired cowboy's eyes narrowed with malignant hatred, he licked his lips; and for an instant his hand at his gun seemed to twitch. Then an expression of distrust erased the lines of hatred on Cooley's countenance. It might be a trick. Henderson was famed for his speed on the draw. While Cooley hesitated, suspicious, uncertain, Henderson steadily walked forward. His eyes were fixed on Cooley. He was seeking to daunt and dominate the other by sheer power of his will.

"I told you to come up and get your time, Cooley," Henderson said, halting hardly five feet away from the other and holding out the check. "It seems your hearing isn't very good today, so I brought it to you."

"Yuh mean yuh're firing me—firing me?" asked Cooley with a snarl.

Henderson nodded, his eyes still fixed on his adversary.

"What fur? What fur? That's what I want to know," Cooley demanded.

"For being hard of hearing." There was a barely perceptible smile on Henderson's face and he heard a suppressed guffaw among the cowboys. A gleam of fury blazed in Cooley's eyes.

"Yuh lie. Yoh're jealous of Miss—"

Cooley never finished the sentence. With the loose limbed leap of a catamount Henderson sprang forward. Cooley's hand was on his gun and he was quick, but the foreman's fist was quicker. Flush on the cowboy's jaw it landed and he dived face forward into the dirt of the corral yard like a poleaxed steer. A swift kick and his revolver went spinning twenty feet away. For a few moments Cooley mechanically twisted about with twitching limbs, then he lurched to his hands and knees and upturned a blood stained face.

"Here's your time, Cooley," Henderson repeated. "Take it," he released the check and it fluttered almost into Cooley's hand. "Take it and get up and get your duds together. I want you to be riding off this ranch in five minutes. Just exactly five minutes. You can take a horse. Leave him at San Rosario. And don't let me ever catch you inside the borders of Bar U again."

Turning on his heel, Henderson walked back to his office. He sensed an added respect in the attitude of his men and he knew that Cooley had forfeited all sympathy by trying to drag Kate's name into the quarrel. But he also knew that Kate would hear of what had happened and in her present mood she probably would think he had been jealous. Well, it wouldn't matter what she thought, not now. Nothing seemed to matter now that he knew he had lost her forever. He seemed tired and old, strangely indifferent to death. No, nothing mattered, now that his last secret hope of winning Kate was gone.

But habit—the habit of years to guard Colonel Miller's interests, held him attentive late that night when Spanish Johnny Torro quietly entered his office.

"That Red Cooley, he make many threats before he go," Spanish Johnny said.

"A kicked cur always howls," Henderson grimly replied.

"Yes, señor, but even a cur may be dangerous if he comes wiz other curs."

"What do you mean, Johnny?"

"You gave heem horse—you tell heem to leave horse at San Rosario. San Rosario is due west, señor. Red Cooley, well, he ride south."

"We're well rid of him at the price of a horse, Johnny."

"Eet ees not the horse I thenk of, señor, eet is Colonel Millair's cattle."

"You mean?"

"Villereal ees to the south, señor, that I know. I also know that Red Cooley have been with Villereal before—that many times before they have run cattle across the border. I thenk maybe he come back, and not alone. I tell you this, señor, that you may be warned. That Red Cooley, he one bad hombre, and Villereal, he much worse." He shrugged his shoulder eloquently.

Henderson thanked Spanish Johnny for the information, even while he made light of the warning; but at midnight, when he finally blew out his little kerosene lamp and rolled into his cot with a heavy sigh, his brow was still contracted in a frown and his eyes were somber. Nor was it entirely due to the pall of despair that seemed to have fallen over his spirit since this last bitter quarrel with Kate. He was wondering if Red Cooley would persuade the bandit to raid the ranch. Although he tried to reason away the possibility as absurd, yet, a vague, formless fear, a presentiment of evil, lurked in the background of his mind and haunted his dreams when he finally fell into a troubled slumber.

THE next night found Happy Henderson and his riding crew fifteen miles from the Bar U ranch on their way to the railroad with Colonel Miller's fall shipment of five thousand longhorns for the stockyards of Kansas City. They had made good progress and the cowboys were in hilariously high spirits as they gathered round the chuck wagon after the day's drive. They would be paid off at the railhead and for the most of them that meant a three day spree. Already they were whooping and laughing like school boys on a holiday and the slack discipline and inefficiency that had marked their recent work on the ranch seemed to have vanished now that they had taken the trail. Henderson felt that Red Cooley's absence also had something to do with the improvement in morale, for the man always had been a trouble breeder and source of dissension.

Despite his relief over the increased willingness of the cowboys, Henderson's heart was heavy and he was still conscious of a nervous apprehension as if the shadow of some impending disaster had overcast his mind. It was too elusive to analyze, but too persistent to ignore. It was partly due, he knew, to the fact that Kate Miller had watched him depart that morning in scornful silence, without a word of farewell. Yet it was something more than that. He did not exactly fear for her safety—two reliable cowboys had been left at the ranch in addition to Aunt Trina and Ah Wong, the Chinese cook—but he could not disabuse his mind of the fear that they both were threatened by some unguessed evil and the malignant, blood-smeared face of Red Cooley was always in the background of his mind.

Ordinarily he would have attributed his nervous depression to the weather and the responsibility of guarding this huge herd of fractious, scarcely domesticated Texas steers. It was hot and oppressive. The faint breeze from the sun baked deserts of Sonora only faintly stirred the scanty pampas grass. The air was heavy with moisture. Horses and men were sweating. The leather of the saddles and reins seemed as sticky as glue. The incessant, sullen rumble of thunder sounded like a far off cannonade and to the south the lightning flickered and flared along the horizon in great sheets of greenish flame. The very air was surcharged with an electric tenseness that seemed to affect both men and beasts.

Henderson had noticed that the cattle were uneasy when he posted his night riders about the edges of the herd after sundown. He had warned each cowboy to take particular care to guard against a stampede. It was on just such nights as these that the wild, easily excitable longhorns often bolted through the darkness in a sudden, inexplicable herd panic of flight, and woe to the man or beast who was caught in their course.

Now, as he rode from post to post in the darkness, Henderson noticed the cattle already had started to mill. The night riders had noticed it, too, and from all points of the compass the quavering voices of the herders joined in a weird, ghostly chorus. One after another of the cowboys took up the dolorous strains of "The Dying Cowboy."

> O bury me not on the lone prairie,
> Where the wild coyotes will howl over me,
> Where the rattlesnakes hiss and the crow flies free—
> O bury me not on the lone prairie.

There was something ineffably depressing in the melancholy words of the chorus, repeated over and over again in the endless refrain, but the music seemed to still the nervous, milling longhorns. Since time immemorial it has been the favorite song of night riders who must "sing the herd to sleep."

But the roll of the thunder sounded deeper and deeper and the incessant, blinding flashes of sheet lightning seemed coming nearer and nearer as the storm clouds rolled up from the Rio Grande. The lowing of this vast herd of cattle sounded like the hoarse murmur of the sea on a surf beaten coast. It drowned out the shrill chant of the cowboys and the turmoil among the milling steers increased as each frightened animal instinctively sought shelter in the center of the herd. As the lightning flamed overhead, Henderson noticed the rolling white eyes of the steers and he shuddered as he saw this sea of tossing horns, a sea that might easily become a tidal wave of destruction.

Henderson had returned to the chuck wagon for a cup of black coffee and was standing beside his horse talking to the "cookee" when he heard a cry in the darkness, a pounding of hoofs, and suddenly Kate Miller came spurring her jaded horse into the circle of fire light.

"Kate! Good God! What's wrong?" Henderson demanded.

"Oh, Bob," she cried, then her hand clutched at her throat, her eyes closed, she reeled and would have fallen from her horse if Henderson had not sprung to her side and steadied her in the saddle.

"What's wrong?" he demanded again.

"Villereal and his band—they've crossed the river—they're on their way here now to stampede the herd across the border," Kate answered.

"How do you know? Who told you?"

"Red Cooley. He came to the ranch house—drunk—and boasting of what he would do to you. I slipped out the back door while Ah Wong was getting him a drink—took Cooley's horse and rode to warn you."

"Where were Al Free and George Harris?" Henderson demanded. These were the cowboys left at the ranch.

"I don't know," said Kate. "Villereal's band must have got them. I didn't see either of them."

"Get Bart Saunders! Quick!" Henderson told the cookee. "And tell every cowboy you meet to scatter out to the north—that the greasers are coming. Grab that extra horse there—and ride like hell!"

But even as the frightened cookee vaulted on the broncho's back a rattle of pistol shots and a series of wild whoops sounded to the northward.

"They're here," Kate cried.

"Tell Bart what's wrong," Henderson shouted to the cookee. "Tell him to try to head the herd away from the river." He did not dare leave the girl. She seemed on the verge of fainting and he knew that now nothing could stop the herd from stampeding. Already, singly and in small groups, longhorns, heads lowered, frantic with fear, were dashing madly away.

WITH a single bound Henderson vaulted into his saddle and caught her bridle rein. "Quick," he commanded. "We must ride for our lives, Kate." He put the spurs to his own horse and quirted her animal so savagely that she would have been unseated as it sprang forward if he had not caught her. Had he been alone Henderson would never have delegated another to take orders to his cowboys—he would have been in the thick of the fight himself—but he knew Colonel Miller would rather lose every steer on his twenty thousand acres rather than have a hair of Kate's head harmed.

"They'll try to stampede the herd south," he cried as their horses broke into a gallop. "We're right in their path. We must get to one side, Kate."

A maddened steer catapulted out of the darkness and sent his horse staggering against hers. The spear-like horn of another steer ripped her riding habit as it swept beside her horse. It was too late. They could never quarter that living torrent, relentless and irresistible as an avalanche. They must ride straight ahead, and ride for their lives, their only hope the speed of their horses. The stampede had started. At the first shot the steers had huddled together; then, with a great rolling bellow of fear, each one of the five thousand longhorns had instinctively turned to the south and simultaneously started a frenzied rush to escape the throng of shooting, shouting riders that had suddenly descended upon the flank of the herd.

"Put the steel to him, Kate," he shouted. Henderson was still holding her bridle rein and quirting her horse as well as his own. Fortunately, the trained bronchos realized the deadly peril as well as their riders and they seemed to fairly fly through the darkness.

Henderson heard a crash behind them, the shock of thudding bodies and the splinter of planks. The vanguard of the steers had charged into and demolished the chuck wagon, but this did not delay their progress. The living stream of animals rolled over and around it as a stream sweeps over a rock.

The frightened horses had drawn clear of the steers, but only a scant thirty feet separated them from the nearest animals. As Henderson rose in his stirrups and looked to the left and right, each flash of lightning revealed a long crescent shaped line of tossing horns rolling across the prairie like the foaming crest of a billow. He and Kate were in the path of twenty thousand hoofs!

The ground was trembling under the thundering beat of these hoofs. The rush of the steer's bodies stirred the sluggish air into gusts and eddies. The pantings, the snorts and the bellowing of the crazed beasts mingled into a maelstrom of sound, awful, deafening, terrifying, like the roar of a cyclone.

As Henderson snatched swift glances behind he could see flashes of flame stabbing the night and he knew that his herd riders were exchanging shots with the Mexicans. He could only hope that the cookee had escaped the sudden rush and carried his message to Bart Saunders. However, he knew his alert cowboys must have divined the purpose of the bandits and he could trust them to do their utmost to divert the course of the herd.

He was gradually working their horses to the left wing of the crescent shaped line, when suddenly a fusillade at the extreme tip of the herd—the perpendicular streaks of flame indicated the men were firing in the air—announced that his own men already had started to swing the steers away from the river.

Almost simultaneously, on the opposite wing of the steers, another series of flashes showed that the bandits were trying to veer the cattle in the opposite direction. Instantly he realized that this placed Kate and himself in even deadlier peril. The wings of the stampeding herd were out-running the center, because the press was not so great on either flank, and now both ends of the bow-shaped line were swinging in towards the center and enveloping them like the closing jaws of a trap. Their horses already were hard pressed to stay ahead of the charging steers; they could hardly hope to muster enough reserve speed to outstrip those converging lines on either wing.

Kate's horse was faltering. She had pushed it hard in the fifteen mile flight from the ranch house and now the tightened bridle rein showed that it could no longer keep pace with Henderson's fresh mount. In vain he quirted the animal mercilessly and urged Kate to spur it on. Its breath was coming in labored gasps, blood flecked foam was dripping from its nostrils and when the greenish sheet lightning flamed across the sky, Henderson could see its glazing eyes.

They were riding knee to knee, and now, when her spent steed suddenly stumbled, he leaned out in his stirrups and plucked her from her saddle just as her horse went down in a heap.

Holding her on his pommel with one arm, he urged his own horse on with quirt and spur and for a short space it actually gained, despite the double burden. On and on they rushed through the darkness and behind them thundered the bellowing herd. Henderson could not see his hand before his face, except when the lightning momentarily illuminated the gloom and he shuddered as he thought of their fate if his horse should stumble into one of the many gopher holes that dotted the prairie. Yet, even as he drove through the darkness, with an awful death rolling behind him, knowing that life hung on a desperate chance, Henderson thrilled with a wild, ecstatic exultation that Kate was in his arms.

THEIR horse had drawn about one hundred yards ahead of the center of the herd, but still he was barely even with the advanced wing and Henderson saw it was hopeless to escape from the jaws of this trap that seemed destined to close upon them. He realized, with sinking heart, that his own broncho was faltering. Kate's additional weight was a fatal handicap. Each time he responded gallantly to the lash with short spurts, but Henderson knew that he could not maintain this terrific pace for long and there was no abatement in the frenzy of the stampeding steers.

Kate was enough of a horse-woman to recognize the evident symptoms of distress of their laboring mount.

"Is it—is it the end, Bob?" she asked as she lay across the pommel in his arms, her riding habit disheveled, her flaxen hair flying. Her lips were almost at his ear.

Again a wild happiness suffused him. She had called him "Bob"—as she had in the old days before she went to college. He knew she had risked her life in that ride across the country to warn him of the impending raid and some instinct whispered that at last she had come to care for him as he cared for her. His arm tightened around her and he was conscious of a raging determination to save her. He *must* save her—must not allow that beautiful face he loved to be crushed to pulp under the pounding hoofs of these frantic beasts.

Once more he quirted the horse with his free arm, nursing his failing strength, striving to impart his own strength and courage to the exhausted animal. Once more the broncho responded but once more after a short burst of increased speed, its heaving sides and unsteady gait showed only too plainly that it was unequal to the task of outrunning these swift, fear inspired long-horns.

If they only could reach the river ahead of the stampede there might be a chance, but the Rio Grande was still miles to the southward and he knew his failing horse would never carry them that far.

A despairing bitterness swept him. The day before he had courted death, had almost been ready to welcome it; but now, with Kate in his arms, he never had desired life so much—yet death, a horrible death, was racing at their heels.

Was there no hope? His horse stumbled as if to answer his question and when the broncho recovered his stride it was limping. At the thought of his utter helplessness, Henderson seemed to go insane. Turning in his saddle, he drew one of his six guns and emptied it blindly in the faces of the galloping steers.

It was madness, he knew. It was like shooting at an avalanche or a cyclone. Still he fired, cursing at each shot, and then, as he looked behind, in a flash of lightning he saw a huge brindle steer crumple under one of his bullets and another steer trip over it and another and another. Swift as the lightning—sheer inspiration if anything ever was—a desperate plan came into his mind.

It was hardly a chance so remote was the possibility of success, yet it offered a bare hope, and every other hope was gone.

"Load my gun," he yelled in Kate's ear and thrust the empty revolver into her hands. He felt her fumbling at his cartridge belt in unquestioning obedience.

"Get ready to jump," he shouted. She shook her head to show she did not understand. "Get ready to jump," he shouted again. "I'll tell you when." This time she nodded her comprehension, although her eyes were wide with fear and he could see her pale face even in the darkness.

For the last time he quirted his horse, mercilessly, savagely, and once more, as if sensing his master's desperate need, the gallant animal rallied its energies.

Ten yards more they gained—twenty yards. The horse's breath was coming in ghastly groans; Henderson could feel its heart pounding between his knees; its heaving sides threatened to break the saddle girths; but on and on it struggled. Once more they were nearly one hundred yards ahead of the pursuing herd, but Henderson knew the animal was dying on its feet and in a few strides more its heart would literally break.

"Now," he shouted in Kate's ear. "Jump!"

Reining in the horse so abruptly that its forefeet ploughed the dirt, Henderson vaulted off the saddle, Kate still in his arms.

As his feet touched earth he almost threw her to the ground. One merciful shot ended his broncho's agony and pulling Kate behind its still quivering carcass, Henderson crouched over her, and pulled his other six gun from its holster.

The ground was shaking as if in an earthquake and a flash of lightning showed him the living wall of steers, horns lowered, eyes gleaming, rushing on them like a tidal wave, hardly fifty yards away.

On thundered the steers. Nothing short of a stone wall, it seemed, could check their charge.

Involuntarily Kate screamed and cowered behind the dead horse, her face buried in her arms. Tight lipped, with narrowed eyes, a six gun in either hand, Henderson crouched over her.

Fifty yards away, forty yards, thirty yards, twenty, now only ten, came the steers. Then Henderson's six guns spoke like the roll of a drum. It was point blank shooting, he could not have missed, and one bullet followed another like the leaden spray from a machine gun.

A huge white chested steer, struck squarely in the forehead, crumpled as though hit by a poleax. Another steer stumbled over this carcass—and went down on top of it. A third beast, catapulted by the pressure behind, bounded over both bodies and came down in mid air with a bullet through its brain. Another charged over it and collapsed, bullet blinded, but not before its momentum had carried it to within five feet of where Henderson crouched over Kate.

Some instinct seemed to guide his shots. In the twinkling of an eye, six steers lay in a heap, legs sprawling, horns interlocked. Every time an animal loomed over this barricade, an unerring bullet stretched it on its fellow.

His six guns were emptied, but he jerked his carbine from its case on his saddle and emptied its magazine. Every shot took effect.

On came the stream of steers. Nothing could have stopped them, but the swiftest river current will divide to flow around a rock and so this torrent of living bodies split to avoid this sudden, growing, insurmountable obstacle, only to unite a few feet beyond it. Here the pressure of the outside wings forced the two streams of animals together again.

THE man and girl crouched in a little island of clear space amid this raging flood of flesh and blood. They were covered with dust, deafened, choked and blinded, but safe now and untouched as the great beasts roared by on both sides, so close they could have touched them on either hand.

For seconds, hours, centuries it seemed, they crouched behind this sheltering wall of flesh. Then, suddenly, they felt a gust of wind—the last of the herd had rushed by—they were saved!

Sham and pretence vanish in moments like these and real emotions, long buried, come rushing to the surface. It takes the nearness of death to reveal the realities of life. For an instant they gazed in each other's eyes and then a spontaneous electric current—maybe it was the lightning—seemed to fuse their very souls.

"Oh, Bob!" she cried, a happy sob in her voice.

"Kate!" he murmured huskily, and then as the great sheet of flame dimmed in the skies, he suddenly found her, alternately laughing and crying, locked in his arms.

Trails

A Crisp Tale of Northwest Justice

By SEWELL PEASLEE WRIGHT

"SQUINT LARKEN'S boozed up again, Jan."

Jan Stevens, of the provincial police, looked up from his work with a mildly inquiring glance.

"Bad?"

"Not yet. But he's fixing to make a night of it, from the looks o' things." Dave Lawrie seated himself on the edge of the rickety iron bed that took a full half of the floor space in the dingy, ill-lighted room. The Prince Edward, despite its rather imposing name, was not a hotel to put on airs. The occasional traveling man, and the still rarer sportsman that put up there invariably heaved a sigh of relief when he checked out over the scarred, worn wooden counter.

Stevens, a blond, powerful figure in his heavy woolen shirt, mackinaw pants, and high pacs, resumed his work. With bright brass snare wire he was binding two thin splints on either side of a bad place in the snowshoe he held across his knees. The frame had splintered near the tail, and the splints were to strengthen the weak place.

While Lawrie watched with silent interest, puffing comfortably on a pipe long since dead between his teeth, Stevens finished the job, and tested the strength of the repaired spot by pressing it against his knee.

"Good pair of webs," he commented laconically. "Good as ever now. How's the missus and the little girl, Dave?"

THE two of them chatted for a few minutes with the careless familiarity of old friends. Stevens was a silent, unsmiling chap, with grave eyes that were as cold and blue as ice, and while everybody knew and respected him, he was on the basis of friendship with but one man: Lawrie, who ran the H. B. store.

Lawrie was just relating with considerable gusto how his young daughter had mushed clear to the store and back with her one-dog "team," and a miniature toboggan he had built for her, when a sudden muffled shout and the sound of a shot brought both men to their feet.

"Larken, I'll bet a dollar!" cried Lawrie with an oath. "He's been looking for trouble all night."

Stevens said nothing, but an instant later he was taking the steps two at a time, clothed for the street.

A little crowd of milling, gesticulating men were gathered in front of the Waldorf

Restaurant, and Stevens hurried in that direction.

The men parted as they saw the tall policeman approaching.

"He's dead," said one of them to Stevens. "Buck Ottis, it is, and nobody knows who done it."

Stevens nodded, and bent over the still figure lying on the packed snow that served as a sidewalk. For a moment he thought his informant had been right, and then he detected a slight flutter of the heart.

Stevens turned to the ring of men that stood silently watching.

"Give me some whisky, one of you!" he ordered briefly.

Smiling rather sheepishly, several men pulled small bottles from their pockets and proffered them. Stevens took the nearest, tore out the cork with a quick gesture, and, lifting the limp head, forced the liquor between the clenched teeth.

Ottis groaned as the burning liquor strangled him, and he opened his eyes drowsily, staring up at Stevens in a dazed fashion.

"He shot me—got me when I warn't lookin'," he gasped painfully. "I—wouldn't give him another drink—and he got me—good. I—I'm through—Stevens!"

"Who did it?" snapped Stevens.

Before he could reply, the dying man's head rolled limply to one side, and Stevens hurriedly administered the rest of the liquor.

Again Ottis' eyelids flickered up.

"Got me, the ——!" he moaned. "When I warn't lookin', too. Damn his lousy soul to hell!"

"Who did it?" cut in Stevens sharply.

"Larken!" groaned Ottis. "Squint Larken, damn him! When I warn't lookin' too. Ah-h-h-h-h!" He drew in his breath sharply, shuddered, and went limp in Stevens' arms.

"One of you help me carry him inside," directed Stevens a moment later. "He's dead."

II

SQUINT LARKEN was a typical no-good of the north. Just how he made his living was something of a mystery, for he never held any job long. He was no railroad man, yet he had worked at times for the C. N. R. and the C. P. He knew nothing of furs, yet he had been in the employ of both the H. B. Company and the free-traders. He knew nothing of trapping, yet he had trapped; he knew nothing of the country, yet he had taken unsuspecting sportsmen into the bush, posing as a guide.

He was tall, a rather hulking figure, with a perpetual grin that exposed broken, tobacco-stained fangs, and eyes that squinted almost painfully. Normally he was good natured and rather pathetic, but alcohol worked a wonderful change in him. It turned his grin into a leer, his squint into a ferocious frown, and buried his good nature in a flood of evil temper.

He had not meant to shoot Ottis. Only Ottis had refused to give him a drink, and he *needed* another drink. Ottis had insulted him by saying he had had enough—as if Ottis knew anything about it! A sudden flood of blood had swept to his brain; he had jerked out his gun and fired at his friend's retreating form, and then, with native cunning, dodged back into the shadows and made his escape before anybody saw him. And now he was a fugitive from justice!

Larken hurried to his little shanty at the edge of town, hastily made up a pack of the things he would need, and slipped into his webs. He had only a vague idea of where he was going, or what he would do, but he knew that that damned policeman, Stevens, would be after him. Somehow, Stevens would find out who did it, and then—Larken quickened his already rapid pace, and pressed on into the black silence of the bush.

Like many men of limited intellect, Larken had an exaggerated idea of his own acumen, and as he put mile after mile behind him, without any evidence of pursuit coming to his ears, he began to whisper exultingly to himself.

"Stevens thinks he's a real policeman, he does. Regular never-fail mountie, or somethin'. Got a record for never failin' to bring in his man, they say. But any damn fool can bring in soused Indians and half-witted bushmen who don't know the war's over.

"Let him catch me, though! I'll show him some tricks he never heard of!"

After a time the effects of the liquor wore off, and he was not quite so confident, yet he kept doggedly on all through the night.

AT DAWN he paused for a few minutes and cooked himself a hurried meal, and a pail of coffee. He did not know how to build a fire that would not smoke, but consoled himself with the thought that his trail was perfectly obvious anyway, so that it made no difference if Stevens did see the faint plume of smoke.

The thought of his trail, laying broad and plain behind him, struck a chill to his heart. No matter how long he made that trail, nor where it led, the man following it would always be sure of one thing; that at the end of the trail was the quarry—Larken!

A cunning light flared up in Larken's eyes. There were many lakes and rivers in the country, and the lakes were, for the most part, swept bare of snow by the strong winds, leaving the ice a hard, smooth surface upon which the soft pacs would leave no trail that could be followed.

Larken soon came to a large, long lake, and he wrung out of his webs with a little triumphant chuckle.

"Let's see you follow *this* trail, Stevens!" he mocked, staring out across the smooth ice. "Here's where you're fooled!"

The even dog-trot across the ice was restful, after the long hours of snowshoeing, for a different set of muscles were brought into play. The lake ran in the general direction in which he was headed, and so Larken followed it to the end, avoiding the smooth, high drifts that confronted him now and then, so that he might leave no trail at all behind him.

Frequently he glanced back, over the tops of the long white drifts, carved and fluted by the wind, but there was no sign of pursuit. He chuckled to himself again and again, and pressed on.

At the end of the lake he slipped into his webs again, and, avoiding the fairly clear course offered by the portage, struck off into the trackless bush.

By noon he was unutterably weary, and he stopped over an hour, resting, when he cooked his lunch.

The lack of any sign of pursuit lulled his fears, and at the first sign of dusk he stopped and made his camp for the night. His aching muscles were beginning to cramp agonizingly, and his head wabbled nervelessly from side to side with utter weariness.

He ate a half-cooked meal and rolled up in his sleeping robe. Three minutes later he was as sound asleep as though the blood of a friend was not less than twenty-four hours old on his hands.

III

THE night was clear and cold; as clear and as cold as nights are only in the far, far north. Underfoot the snow was dry and hard, like sugar, and every twig and branch was as brittle as glass. Even the air was brittle; in the intense silence it seemed that a sudden sound would shatter the whole fabric of the universe.

Through the clear, icy moonlight strode a dark figure: Stevens. His shoulders were sagging with weariness, and there was a mechanical quality to his stride that bespoke the rebellion of outraged sinews, but he did not pause. His eyes were fixed on a shadowy trail in the glittering snow, and except that every few seconds his eyes lifted to pierce the surrounding bush, they never wandered from the dimly-outlined tracks he was following.

Of a sudden he stopped and sniffed the air. A faint taint of wood smoke had drifted to his nostrils.

Suddenly alert, he crept forward, silent and cautious now; his rifle ready for instant action, and his head moving from side to side as his sharp, cold eyes sifted the shadows.

A tiny speck of red glowed in the darkness straight ahead, and Stevens knew it for the dying coals of a fire.

Was Larken there? Or had he merely paused to cook a meal? Stevens took no chances, and crept up with a crafty stealth.

With a grim smile, he noted the dark figure rolled in the sleeping robe, the webs sticking at tired angles in a convenient drift, and the little litter of cooking utensils and food.

"Poor devil," the thought ran through Stevens' mind. "He's no bushman at all. He hadn't a chance in the world."

Then Stevens did what might be thought a very foolish thing. He retraced his steps perhaps a hundred yards, and quietly pitched his tarpaulin. In the lee of this meager protection he placed his sleeping robe.

"Might as well let the poor devil get a few hours more of good sleep," he mused as he rolled into the furry warmth of the robe.

"He'll need it. I'll be awake long before he will; time to pick him up then. This way I won't have to worry about a prisoner all night. Sleep well, Squinty!"

Stevens snuggled more comfortably into the robe and very promptly dropped off to sleep.

IV

A LITTLE before dawn the following morning Stevens awakened, just as he had planned. Quietly he packed up his tarp and his sleeping robe, and then made his way to Larken's camp.

Silently he strode over to the sleeping figure.

"Let's go, Larken," he remarked casually.

Larken sat up suddenly in his robe, his eyes wide and staring.

"Stevens!" he gasped chokingly, and his unshaven face drained strangely white. "Oh, God!"

Stevens felt a sudden pang of pity; a weakling in the immensity of the northland is a pitiful thing indeed.

"Tough luck, Larken," he said slowly, picking up his prisoner's gun and storing it safely away in a capacious pocket. "A man like you ought never to touch booze. Get up, and let's have some breakfast."

Larken crawled out of his sleeping robe, and stumbled to his feet. With trembling hands he started rolling up the robe, while Stevens busied himself with a fire. He did not make the mistake, however, of becoming careless. He knew the ratty courage of the coward, and he kept his prisoner constantly in sight.

The breakfast was a dismal meal, although both men ate heartily. The hot food and the strong coffee seemed to put new courage into Larken. Brooding hate began to shine in his squinting eyes, and he watched Stevens' every move as a cornered rat might watch a crouching cat.

"How are the old legs?" asked Stevens cheerily when they were packed and ready for the trail. "Think you can make it all right?" He knew that Larken was no true bushman, and he had noted his prisoner's legs trembling with weakness.

"I suppose I'll have to, somehow," growled Larken. "Every muscle aches, though, and I'm weak as a cat. I am that. Couldn't we rest up awhile? You'll get me back soon enough," he added bitterly.

"Let's see." Stevens thought a moment. There was a very serious possibility that if he pushed Larken too hard, he would have a very sick man on his hands. Prolonged showshoeing is exquisite torture to one unaccustomed to it, and leads to *mal de racquette*, that terrible cramp that ties a man into a writhing knot of agony.

"Young Douglas' headquarters camp isn't far from here; about two miles straight west through the bush, I figure it. We might mush over there and give you a chance to rest up a bit. What do you say?"

"That's talking like a white man," said Larken, and a crafty light flared up in his beady eyes. The longer he was alone with Stevens the better chance he had of escape—and escape was the uppermost thought in his mind.

THEY found the camp without difficulty. Douglas himself was not there, but they made themselves at home, and soon had the snug, low-roofed cabin warm and comfortable.

There were two bunks in the camp, but they did not use them. Instead they spread their robes on the floor, when night came, and prepared to make themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit. In the north one thinks nothing of using another man's camp, in case it is convenient, but his grub, his furs and his blankets are sacred.

"I'm sorry, Larken," said Stevens, drawing forth a pair of wrist irons from his pack. "I'll have to snap these on for the night, however, so I can get some sleep too."

Larken, who had already planned what he would do once Stevens was safely asleep, saw his whole air castle falling about his ears. He swore silently, but held out his hands obediently, shivering as the cold metal touched his naked skin.

Stevens snapped on the one bracelet, carried the short length of chain around the stout post that supported one of the bunks, and then snapped on the other handcuff, thus making it impossible for Larken to move more than a foot or two one way or the other.

"Well, good night, Larken," he said as he blew out the light. "Hope you sleep well in spite of the irons. We've got a long trip ahead."

" 'Night!" growled Larken ungraciously. He had not planned on being ironed for the night, and his cunning brain was already busy trying to figure some way out of his dilemma.

Cautiously he waited until Stevens' deep breathing assured him that his captor was asleep, and then he started trying to pull his wrists free. The sharp shoulders of the handcuffs bit into his flesh, but he gritted his teeth and strained against the unyielding iron until he could feel the warm blood trickling down his wrists.

AT LAST, convinced that he could not free himself in that way, he started pulling against the stout post around which his hands were linked. The post did give a little, but he could not tear it free. He rested for a moment, thinking. A sudden idea came to him.

With fingers that trembled with sudden excitement he felt around the lower end of the post, where it came in contact with the floor. His heart gave a great throb as he determined that the end of the post had not been cut square, and was resting only lightly against the floor.

He slid the chain down, holding it in place with one hand, and started pulling, sawing slowly, quietly, back and forth.

For a time he made no progress, then the chain started to work under the post. A cold sweat poured from Larken, and he feared the loud beating of his heart would waken Stevens, but he worked on; tugging, sawing, wrenching, until at last with a soft splintering sound and a brief click of the chain, the links slipped clear.

With a silent chuckle, Larken held his manacled hands above his head triumphantly.

With the key in his possession, he could open the locks, throw off the irons, and once more be free. Stevens had the key, no doubt. He did not dare search the sleeping man, for fear he would awake. There was only one course to pursue, and Larken did not hesitate.

Silently he kneeled beside the sleeping body of the policeman, then, crossing the heavy manacles, he raised his arms high above his head and brought the heavy shackles down with crushing force on the sleeper's defenceless head.

A sighing moan whistled from between Stevens' lips, and he seemed to settle limply, more comfortably, into his sleeping robe.

V

THE dawn found Larken miles away. He was filled with a strange mixture of exuberance and fear. He wished he had obeyed his first impulse, and shot the policeman, and he cursed himself for a soft-heart because he had not.

"Damn him, he *might* live!" muttered Larken. "That trapper might come in and find him, and nurse him along. I ought to have bumped him off when I had the chance; that's what I ought to have done!"

He tried to console himself with the thought that Stevens' light fluttering heartbeats were a good sign that death was not far away, and he reflected complacently upon the weight of the manacles, and the terrific blow he had struck with them. But just the same he pushed on as fast as he could, and cast many fearful glances behind him.

As the day wore on, an increasing suspicion rose in his mind that he had been traveling in a great arc. Gradually, too, the thought came to his mind that he had no destination; up until then his only thought had been to escape. A sudden fear seized him.

What a fool he was! Why, he was lost! He didn't know the country; a few days aimless traveling through the bush and his grub would give out, and then where would he be?

Feverishly he began making plans. The thing to do was to get out to the track, down the line somewhere. Nobody would be looking for him there, and with the money he had on him, little as it was, he could get away. Outside, somewhere in a big city, he would be safe—safe!

If he could only get back to the camp, and back track from there until near the town, he would be all right. That was the thing to do, undoubtedly. He could even re-provision at the camp, provided Douglas hadn't returned and found Stevens' body.

He had been swinging in a circle, he was sure of that; circling to the left. He had heard people did that. Left leg shorter than the right, somebody had said, although he didn't believe that part of it. Why, then, shouldn't he cut straight back to the cabin? That would be shorter, quicker—and he was in a very fever of haste.

He paused and studied the landscape for

a moment, figuring where the cabin would lie. He even located some landmarks to keep him on a straight course. Then, traveling with nervous haste, he set out in the direction of the camp.

For perhaps three hours he hurried along, and then he saw something in the snow ahead that sent a sudden cold chill tingling along his spine. *A fresh trail in the snow!*

VI

HURRIEDLY glancing around he studied the track. Undoubtedly it was fresh, very fresh. Even his inexperienced eye could see that. And then he saw something that made his face go white; a peculiar blur in one set of tracks; a familiar thing, that, the mark left by a patch on one of Stevens' webs.

So Stevens was not dead! He swore aloud, and his voice was harsh in the heavy, icy silence. Stevens was on his trail! Evidently the policeman had noted that the fugitive was swinging around in a circle, and with the cunning of the professional man-catcher, had cut across in a straight line to intercept him.

"Well, you'll be fooled this time, Mr. Policeman," said Larken grimly. "You'll find I'm not such a fool as you think. It'll take you some time to figure out what I'm doing, and then you'll have to back-track me, instead of short-cuttin' like this. And by the time you get back to the cabin, I'll be a long way off. I ought to beat you easy, with your head feelin' as it likely does!"

Knowing that the safest way to the cabin was to follow the tracks that had so disturbed him, Larken hurried along. It was nearly dark nevertheless when he first sighted the cabin, and his head was light and dizzy with fatigue and hunger. He had not eaten all day save for a few mouthfuls he had munched as he went; he had been afraid to stop for a moment. His experience the previous morning had taught him a lesson.

There was no smoke coming from the chimney; that was proof that Douglas had not returned. That was the one thing that Larken had feared. Now the coast was clear, and he left the trail and headed directly for the snow-buried cabin.

He wrung out of his webs hurriedly, visions of a warm meal swarming to his mind, and opened the door.

VII

AS THE door swung wide, a harsh voice crackled.

"Stick up your hands, Larken—quick!" There was the unmistakable click of a cocked hammer.

Larken obeyed with galvanic suddenness. It was Stevens who had spoken!

"Come inside—but keep your hands high—so! No, don't close the door just yet; I need the light. Now take one hand—one only—and light the lamp there—fine! Now close the door!"

Larken, stunned into silence, obeyed almost mechanically. Stevens, the man he had thought he had killed, and whose trail he had later seen far out in the bush, was alive, and here in the camp! It was impossible—but true.

Stevens, his face deadly white, save where it was streaked black with dried blood, was seated on the floor, leaning against the bunk. His knees were drawn up close to his body, and steadied across them was the barrel of a heavy revolver.

"I don't quite understand why you came back," said Stevens with quiet grimness, "but—you'll not be leaving again until I go, I promise you that, Larken!"

"But—" Larken found his voice, and his wits at last—"I saw your trail out in the bush—where you'd been following me—your fresh trail."

"*What?*"

"Your trail. I saw it. Knew it on account of that patch on the frame. It leaves a blurred mark in the snow. 'Way out in the bush. And now you're here, ahead of me!"

"I haven't left this spot. Been too weak," replied Stevens, shaking his head.

"But I saw your trail—fresh trail," persisted Larken doggedly.

Stevens pondered the moment, and then solution struck him. The cold light in his eyes gave way for an instant to a gleam of sardonic amusement.

"I guess I know what happened," he said quietly. "In your hurry last night, you put on my webs instead of your own. They're the same make, and we use the same hitch. You never noticed the difference. You unlucky devil, Larken—it was *your own trail* you saw!"

Everybody's Meeting PLACE

Where writers, readers and the editor gather for informal discussion

THE VERDICT NO WESTERNS

TWO months ago, in this department, I asked whether readers of magazines were getting tired of Western stories. The answers to that question are just beginning to come in. So far, not one letter has had anything very favorable to say about Westerns. On the contrary.

For instance, a New York doctor says unequivocally, "I am heartily tired of Wild West stories and choose mystery and adventure stories of the type written for you by Francis D. Grierson and Beatrice Grimshaw. I never seem to tire of them and personally could do well without the Westerns though the ones you select are about the best of their kind."

A letter from El Paso, Texas—and surely that is in the land of the old romantic West—is just as emphatic. J. M. P., its writer says, "As a rule I don't like Westerns, as they are all so much alike but I do like the unusual Western story, but like ice cream as a steady diet one soon gets fed up and I think our magazines have made the mistake of giving readers too many Westerns. I like your magazine in the new form much better than the old. Just keep up the good work and you will have plenty of readers but for Pete's sake, don't go to the all Western or confession type. There are plenty of them on newsstands already. Let us keep our self respect."

It is E. C. of Portland, Oregon, however, who puts the case for the Western story most fairly. He writes:

> In the back of the magazine you ask readers to give you their opinion on Westerns. I write the darned things myself, but I think I can give you my unbiased opinion of their place in Everybody's. I believe that a great many people are tiring of too much western diet in fiction, just as they are tiring of the wholesale deluge of confessions. In a magazine like yours, I think two or three Westerns ought to hold down the appetite of those who like them. If they want more, let them purchase the Western magazines that publish nothing else. But in Everybody's, give us that bill of fare which takes in the wide world. Stories like *Black Men & Ivory*, and Grimshaw's *Black Sheep's Gold*, carry a lure which, I believe, is not apt to fail of its attraction very soon. More power to Everybody's in its present form, and although I hope to sell you a Western myself, some day, I'd say keep them down to a minimum. If that excludes me and a lot of other Western story writers—so be it. What I'm giving you now is my opinion of what will carry the magazine farthest, and that is what is wanted by every one of your well wishers.

I think what I'll do is follow E. C.'s advice and publish a few Westerns, the best and most unconventional stories of this type I can find. So here begins a search for Western stories that will please even the reader who is fed up with them!

THE VARIED BILL OF FARE

I DON'T see really why the contents of a magazine shouldn't approximate somewhat the well planned dinner. There should be something light, there should be something substantial, there should be a touch of acid and there should be a sweet.

In fact, a number of readers have written me that is exactly what they want.

I don't know how closely the contents of this issue hit the mark. But it is a varied program. Certainly, Captain Dingle with his short tragic tale supplies the acid, Hubert L. Smith's wonderfully ridiculous story *Alexander's Rag Time Jag* is the dessert and for the substantial course in the meal I vote, for one thing, for *Beast of the Bosveld*.

But it's about time I began to tell you about some of the writers of these stories.

A NEIGHBOR OF THE ZULUS

WHEN *Beast of the Bosveld* came into the office and I began to read it I thought, "Well, here's a man who most assuredly knows his stuff!" So I dashed off a letter to E. van Lier Ribbink and told him how much I liked the novelette and also asked him if he knew Africa, the Zulus, sacred crocodiles and all the other colorful things he describes so well.

His answer, modestly placed in the third person, was this:

> E. van Lier Ribbink, formerly of Pretoria, South Africa, newspaper man and writer, now a resident of California, speaks with some degree of authority on "Africana"—particularly on those parts of Africa that are situated between the Zambesie and Capetown, as well as on the torrid coastal strip that reaches from Zanzibar to the meeting place of Indian Ocean and South Atlantic. Van Ribbink, whose father was a high official of the former South African Republic, under President Kruger, has met, face to face, many men, who, to the outsider, are merely famous names. He has known Oom Paul, and has listened to the roar of the "Leeuw van Rustenburg"—the Lion of Rustenburg—as the great Boer President was named by his people. He has worked on the administrative staff of the late General Louis Botha, Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, and is personally acquainted with General Jan Smuts. During his life in South Africa, van Ribbink made a close study of that most interesting human, the Kaffir, Zulus, Basutos, Shangaans, Xosas, Matabeles, etc. In addition to his native tongue, Dutch, he acquired a working knowledge of Bantu dialects, and became thoroughly acquainted with the customs and beliefs of the various tribes. He has watched the native either "superintending" the work of womenfolk in the "mealie-fields," at play, at the war-dance, and in the compounds of the Kimberley, and Premier Mine diamond fields. Also, he has met the wily Hottentot in his last preserve—the Clan William and Calvinia districts of the Western Cape Colony on the borders of what was once known as German South West Africa. Furthermore, van Ribbink has made a study of South African and East Coast fauna, and he has been a particularly close observer of the almost human antics of that great South African Simian, the "Baviaan," or Baboon, which he describes as a decided link, and not a missing one, either.
>
> In connection with *Beast of the Bosveld*, Mr. van Ribbink lived next door to Dinizulu, last King of the Zulus, when the deposed monarch was in Pretoria awaiting deportation to his place of exile, a farm in the Waterberg district of the Transvaal. King Dinizulu had just come from prison at Eshowe. He had been found guilty by a Natal court of conspiracy in having incited his Induna, Bambata, to attack the whites. Van Ribbink as neighbor became well acquainted with the fallen monarch, frequently calling upon him. He describes Dinizulu as an obese, small-eyed person of great native cunning.

With that background, van Ribbink should certainly have more stories for us and I want him to take this as notice that we all expect to see them.

A WRITER OF VARIED TALES

ANOTHER writer, new to the new Everybody's, makes his début in this number. I'm referring to Walter W. Liggett. I want you to pay particular attention to him because I have a number of stories coming from him—and what a varied lot of stores they are! *Stampeded*, of course, is a Western but I have some prize-fighting stories from Liggett that I think are even better than *Stampeded*. Best of all, is a very grim story so good, so human, so filled with the pity of man's eternal struggle toward the stars that I couldn't resist taking it, tragic as it is. I am holding up its publication until some month when I feel particularly courageous. Meanwhile, let Liggett tell you about himself. No wonder he can write a great variety of stories.

> There really isn't much to tell about myself. I was born in 1886 on a 2,000 acre ranch in Western Minnesota; spent part of my boyhood in a log cabin in the great north woods when real frontier conditions prevailed; saw the last great logging drive on the upper Mississippi; went through public schools and attended high school two years—specializing mostly in football—and then started as a cub reporter at the age of eighteen.
>
> I have worked on most of the leading papers all over the West in every capacity from police reporter to city editor. I even attained the dizzy eminence of managing editor on two small dailies

—one of which was the Skagway *Daily Alaskan*. In the meantime, in between time, I took several whirls at politics. No, I never was foolish enough to run for office myself. I always was the tail of someone else's kite, but on one or two occasions I've done some pretty lofty flying.

Some eight years ago I came East and after working on the *Sun*, *The Post* and *The Times*, and several other New York papers, and watching the wheels go around at Washington, D. C. a couple of years, I decided it was about time to tackle writing in a serious way—for that always had been my real ambition.

Football and boxing are my hobbies. I'll drive a hundred miles any Saturday to see a big game and though I'm old enough to know better I'd still rather box than eat. In fact, Philadelphia Jack O'Brien told me once that I could make more money boxing than writing and for a while it looked as if he were right. But that's another forgotten dream and now I do most of my fighting in the vicarious form of short stories. It's easier on the eyes.

AND NOW FOR HUMOR

JUMPING to the other extreme of that tragic story of Liggett's I was telling you about, let's consider the author of that perfectly absurd story, *Alexander's Rag Time Jag*. I think HUBERT SMITH'S letter is almost as amusing as his story. Here it is:

> Your friendly letter accepting the rooster story at hand. I thank you very much, both for the acceptance and for dispelling a misconception of mine. From what I have always read, I thought, of course, an editor was a kind of exaggerated ogre—an icy super-monster without bowels of mercy whose days were devoted solely to thinking lofty, scornful thoughts and mailing rejection slips. But now your letter comes along—an easy, breezy, extra-human sort of letter—and my theory is exploded.
>
> You see, while I am a practiced fiction writer (since I've written dope for real estate companies both in Florida and in Los Angeles), this is my first magazine story and you were the first editor I sprang it on.
>
> There is nothing about myself of breathless interest. From boyhood my life has been spent in the border states and in various republics of Spanish America—about 50-50 of each. Somehow I've always had a hankering to get in on the ground floor in new countries, so I've gotten in on lots of 'em—dirt floors mostly, with squashy places where the thatch leaked, and badly in need of sweeping. I'll warrant that in the practice of my profession of ground-flooring, I've ridden the most onery mules, sailed on the smelliest schooners, eaten the largest bean weevils and most sawdusty tortillas, capsized from the crankiest canoes and been bitten by the greatest number and variety of mosquitoes, jiggers, "he-hens," chinchas, rotadores, horseflies, bot-lasses, flying bed-bugs and fool money-making schemes of any member of the calling. Other "tropical tramps" indignantly refute this assertion of mine. They claim all these honors for themselves. It's just like the gall of 'em!
>
> It would disgust the parlor fire-eater, however, to learn that, while I've had some disagreeable experiences with bandits, I never was inveigled into taking personal part in a revolution but once, and even then my position was inconspicuous—just as inconspicuous as a man who is very near half-way between six feet and seven feet tall could possibly make himself.
>
> Of course, living so long in the wilds, I've had some dealings with snakes, jaguars, alligators, and things, but the most truly thrilling animal adventure I ever had was being attacked by an enraged cockroach. I was sinking some prospect holes in the Sierra Madres of Mexico and slept on the ground under a smelly, old cowhide set up on some crooked sticks for a shelter. One night, while I was dreaming of a bonanza, the cockroach, crouching low and lashing his tail with fury, crept out of his lair in the cowhide and jumped at me, landing full in my face. Only half awakened, I moved up my right wing for a counter-offensive, but the enemy's drive reached my ear where he proceeded to dig in. When he got down to the drum of my ear, I woke up all over and with vast enthusiasm brought all of my forces into action—including my vocabulary. (I know some of these metaphors are mixed, but my emotions weren't at the time.) The cockroach refused to retrace his steps, so I lay on my side and poured water into my ear for two hours while he completed his elaborate death struggles. If anybody doesn't think that's thrilling, it's because he never had a cockroach engage in sapping and mining operations on his ear-drum—using an air-hammer mostly. It was several years before an aurist removed that cockroach—thoroughly dead, but obdurate to the last.

A LETTER FROM ALASKA

AS USUAL, I've reached the end of my allotment of space without getting in half I had to say. For this department you see is the one place where the editor can spread his egotism to his heart's content. And just to show you how egotistic I've become this month I'm going to conclude now with a letter from W. G. of Cordova, Alaska.

> In your EVERYBODY'S Meeting Place page (April issue) I read your article about Mr. William R. Kane asking what kind of stories readers like best. Now I can't answer for everybody, but I'll say this much, that since you wrapped a new cover around the outside of your magazine and put new pages and new stories written by authors who know how to write good stories it's as good as *Adventure* and that's saying a good lot.
>
> From your news of May issue it sounds like the best ever. For a new editor you're doing first rate. Keep it up.

And now if you feel I'm getting a little set up and need taking down, come on with your most drastic comments. There's only one thing I like better than an enthusiastic letter. And that is a very torrid blast. (I've had 'em, too.) O. G.

The NEWS *of* NEXT MONTH

Beginning a Timely Novel of the
Chinese Hatred of Foreign Devils

The SOCIETY *of the* SILVER SHOE

By CHARLES GILSON

Two Complete Novelettes

PUDDING STONE

By Anthony M. Rud

A story of man's brutality to man in the old gold fields of the frozen North country.

PARMLEY'S REWARD

By Frederick Moore

An ingenious story of a well plotted robbery, its scenes laid in tranquil New England.

And Among the Short Stories

MAY THE BEST MAN WIN, a great prize-fighting story by Walter W. Liggett; THE CAT'S MEOW, a highly humorous story of three doughboys and twenty-five cats by H. M. Sutherland; THE CROW WOMAN, an unusual Western story by Arthur Chapman, and several other stories of action and adventure.